A VIABLE THEOLOGY FOR DYING AND

ITS IMPLEMENTATION WITHIN

THE LOCAL CHURCH

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ABSTRACT

Theology is called to make death "make sense" in our contemporary society. During the past two decades, American society has been deluged with thanatological studies, seminars, and self-help groups. While major researchers hypothesize on the impotency of the Church and the marked fear of dying and death among Church members, the Church has remained silent. The Church has not responded to a perceived death phobia within American culture, and has allowed secular segments within society to mediate the meaning(s) of living, dying and death.

This study, written from a sociological perspective, analyzes: (1) the causative factors of the American death phobia; (2) the faith process in contemporary culture; (3) the scholastic interpretations of the doctrines of immortality and resurrection; and, (4) the relevant theological strands on dying from the period of the Primitive Church, noting how those strands have effected Christian funereal practices and customs. The Church has often been inadequate in responding to the needs of persons for meaning(s) and purpose(s) in living and dying. The Church has tended to moralize, rather than theologize. By definition, Christians in contemporary society are deviants.

Relying on the scholarship of Helmut Thielicke, Jim A. Sanders and traditional Wesleyan theology, a viable theology for dying and living is formulated within this study. Means for implementing this theology within the local parish are delineated. Parish possibilities for integrating the theology within the ongoing parish programming are outlined, as are three models for planning and leading a death and dying

workshop for the parish and/or community.

At the core of a Christian theology for dying and living, there must be the gospel message. God is a transforming God, and Jesus Christ is the means for that transformation. The transforming God of the Judeo-Christian tradition calls earthly pilgrims into a relationship. And, death does not sever that relationship. This study is a challenge to readers to observe American cultural responses to death; to develop a "keen ear" in listening to parishioners recite their thoughts on death and dying; and, to review their own, personal theology for dying and living.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

Sociologist Peter Berger emphatically states: "The power of religion depends, in the last resort, upon the credibility of the banners it puts in the hands of men as they stand before death, or more accurately, as they walk, inevitably, towards it."[1] In three major studies conducted by psychologist Herman Feifel, Feifel found that among subjects he studied that, when compared to the non-religious person, the religious person was more fearful of death.[2]

Historically, the Christian Church has been the mediator of life, death, and life after death. However, during the twentieth century, the Church's mediating role has been greatly diminished. The interpretation of the purpose and meaning of life and death has increasingly been moderated by secular elements within our technological American society. The affluent seek technologically-inspired means of achieving immortality by cryogenic preservation of the physical body. A segment of American society has become intrigued with "life after death" experiences, a parapsychological approach to the phenomena of death. From the field of psychiatry comes the assertion that Freud was wrong: it's not the sexual instinct which is at the root of human neuroses. Rather, human neuroses is attributed to

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[1] Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967) p. 51.

[2] Herman Feifel, "Attitudes Towards Death," in his The Meanings of Death (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1959) p. 121.

humanity's awareness of the mortality of all persons. A neuroses requiring "human heroics" in order to cope with the awareness of inevitable death. . . .[3]

During the past two decades, denominational churches have: (1) taken a back seat in conducting last rites, as secular funeral "cathedrals" have sprung-up with slumber rooms and cosmetically soothing funeral services; and, (2) formed task force groups to develop more comprehensive evangelism programs in a concerted effort to prop declining membership rolls. And, during this same time frame, the American public has been deluged with a plethora of death and dying presentations in the media, pop-art, and music. Within the secular world thanatological conferences, ethics seminars, study courses, and self help groups have emerged at a steady pace to impact the notion of a fear of death in the American society. Numerous studies have been conducted to determine death attitudes among the dying, ethnic groups, children, college students, and physicians.[4]

No concerted effort has been made on the part of the Church to correlate declining membership with the Church's diminished role as mediator in interpreting the meanings of life and death for its membership

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[3]Ernest Becker, The Denial of Death (New York: Free Press, 1973) pp. 17-19.

[4]Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, On Death and Dying (New York: Macmillan, 1969); Richard A. Kalish and D. K. Reynolds, Death and Ethnicity (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1976); Myra Bluebond-Langer, "Meanings of Death to Children," Herman Feifel (Ed.) New Meanings of Death, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977); Edwin S. Schneidman (Ed.) Death and the College Student (New York: Behavioral Publications, 1972); Herman Feifel, "Physicians Consider Death," Proceedings of the American Psychological Association (1967) 201.

and society. No organizational emphasis has been made to provide death education programs in the local churches, although there are abundant resources available to initiate such programs. Nor has there been an attempt on the part of the Protestant Church to articulate a theology of dying and death in response to a societal fear of death. Where does the Church stand in regard to thanatological issues? What is, or should be, the Church's task in responding to a death phobia which is prevalent within the American culture? Does the gospel of Jesus Christ offer a relevant message to twentieth century Americans concerning the meanings of life and death?

Thesis

The thesis presented in this paper is: The Church is called, indeed challenged, to accept its role as purveyor of the theological meanings of life and death - i.e., to serve as a principle socializing agent in conveying death education and nurture in the congregation and the community to undergird and enable persons in the task of developing a theological understanding of dying and death. The focal point of this thesis reflects Paul Tillich's question: "And, if one is not able to die, is he really able to live?"[5] It is not the goal of this paper to make dying the central concern in ministry. A balance is sought, a balance whereby the Church is perceived (by the congregation and the community) as being the interpreter of the meanings of life and death. It is my assertion that the secular resurgence of interests

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[5]Paul Tillich, The Eternal Now (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963) p. 124.

in death and societal interests in spiritualism are reflective of the technological era in which we live and confusion within the Christian community over what Christian doctrine has to say concerning immortality and resurrection. The crux of Christian death education is a reclaiming of the central gospel message.

The contemporary Church has been inadequate in providing death education and enabling skills in the congregation and in the community. The pastor, as interpreter and teacher of the Christian faith, is called: to declare the basic tenets of that faith in regard to life and death; to prophetically recount Christian traditions, enabling persons to appropriate faith in coping with individual mortality; and, to guide persons in applying the tenets of faith to current social and ethical issues relevant to thanatology. "Thanatology," thoughts pertaining to dying and death, needs to be presented as Christian-thanatology. The Christian story, the gospel message, presents a particular view, a unique mindset, concerning life lived towards death.

The results of the studies completed by Feifel, which indicate Church-affiliated persons are more fearful of death,[6] warrant the attention and concern of Church boards. Moreso, it indicates reparative work needs to be initiated within the local church, that the Church needs to reappropriate its role as socializing agent in death education and as the relater of faith traditions concerning dying and death.

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[6]Feifel, "Attitudes Towards Death," p. 121.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to formulate a theology for dying, and to provide information and guidance which will facilitate the implementation of that theology via programming within the local church and the community. The studies presented provide background information and resource materials which will prepare the pastor, enabling him/her to work with and prepare the church for an ongoing death education program which reflects the basic tenets of the Christian faith and serves to counter civil-religious and/or secular views on dying and death. The information presented is retrievable for utilization in workshops, sermons, and small group work. The paper assumes a "shotgun" approach - i.e., each chapter could be greatly expanded. The focus is on providing a broad spectrum of information which is reflective of both the Church's historical roots and practice, as well as relevant sociological "givens," givens being that which "is," or is assumed to be.

Scope

This paper does not focus on counseling with the dying or ministry in bereavement work. Adequate information in those areas is available, and resources are cited in the Appendices to the paper. Nor are developmental-educational theories or theories addressing the secularization of the Church of central concern. Again, those areas have been adequately surveyed. The emphasis is on providing a means for persons to understand and deal with life, dying, and death within a nurturing framework of Christian tradition, within a viable theology for dying and living. The focus is on death education if education is

perceived to be relevant, nurturing learning experience, which enables persons to appropriate faith and apply tenets of faith to everyday living.

The paper is written from the perspective of the United Methodist Church. A basic, underlying assumption, which was inferred previously, is: persons who understand and who appropriate the basic tenets of faith and tradition and have the opportunity to dialogue about dying and death issues within the community of faith will be enabled to develop an informed stance and personal decision-making ability in regard to thanatological social and ethical issues. The Church exists in and for the world; it is a part of the society in which it witnesses. Consequently, the scholastic approach assumed in this paper is representative of the discipline of sociology and draws on principles which have evolved from modern sociological schools of theory.

Terms

The sociological perspectives set forth provide an understanding of the causal factors in society which have led to a death phobia in American culture and the contemporary resistance movement which is attempting to combat those factors - e.g., the thantological conferences, self-help groups, and study seminars. The pivotal sociological view in this paper is that American culture's response to death is a "social problem." Horton and Leslie define a social problem as: "a condition affecting a significant number of people in ways considered undesirable, about which it is felt something can be done through

collective action."[7] Society has a grievance, a desire for a change in direction. In regard to this paper, the plethora of death and dying presentations signifies that the cultural response to death is unacceptable to a segment of persons within society. As discussed within chapter two, it is a social problem because it is effected by several, interacting and mutually reinforcing elements within society. The social problem impacts on individuals within society and within the Church, and because the Church has not adequately responded to the death phobia within culture, other elements within society, such as psychiatrists, funeral home directors, physicians, or educators, have sought to mediate the causes of a societal death phobia and prescriptions for the cure of the phobia.

Within the discipline of sociology, there are basically four schools of thought, differentiated by their views of what comprises the dynamics of societal reality. The lines between the schools often blur; a particular school does not have either a rigidity of thought or a homogeneity among its adherents; and, a sociologist may swing from one school of thought to another, as appropriate, in analyzing a particular facet of society or the societal response to a certain situation. The differing sociological schools are outlined, simplicitly, in order to: (1) indicate the sociological bias of this paper; (2) provide the reader with information concerning the various sociological approaches utilized in analyzing social problems; and, (3) to stimulate thinking in a wholistic, sociological perspective, as it is applicable to the

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[7]Paul B. Horton and Gerald R. Leslie, The Sociology of Social Problems (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1974) p. 4.

mission and ministry of the Church. The four basic sociological approaches are: (1) the censensual or structural-functional school; (2) the conflict school; (3) the symbolic interactionalism or ethnomethodological school; and, (4) the neoconservative school.

The Consensual School. The consensual or structural-functional school views social reality as a system. Society could be viewed as being pie-shaped, and each section of the pie contributes something (positively or negatively), which supports and legitimates other sections. A classic example of functional analysis could be: Funeral homes do a billion dollar business, because they are able to cosmetically make the deceased look as if they are sleeping and not dead. Positively, the funeral homes facilitate disposal of corpses and provide incomes for many persons. Negatively, the funeral industry contributes to the denial of death and takes the funeral service away from the Church.

Functionalists, such as Talcott-Parsons, assume that all societies have the same functional prerequisites or needs.[8] While the school doesn't state specific ways social problems are to be corrected, the educative or socializing forces are viewed as key in determining social patterns.

According to functionalists Merton and Nisbet, a social problem exists when there is a discrepancy between what society needs or desires and what reality actually is. Social problems are manifested

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[8]Talcott Parsons, The Social System (New York: Free Press, 1951).

when it is realized that the societal needs are threatened or are not being fulfilled.[9]

The Conflict School. The conflict approach focuses on two interacting levels, the level of society and the level of the individuals within society. At the societal level a break-down occurs in the traditional social order. The break-down can be caused by external events, such as war, tremendous technological discoveries, or the weakening of the Church's influence on a society. Or, internally, the break-down could occur through population shifts, economic crises, or an evolving change in societal goals and values. Mauss notes that "the general idea is that some kind of unexpected or large scale phenomenon has spread confusion or chaos, where before there was peace and order."[10]

Conflict theorists, as a rule, view society as being comprised of several interest groups, each vying to enforce its values and beliefs. Consequently, predominant societal beliefs and values are of key interest to conflict theorists. The conflict models focus on how beliefs and values function in interest groups, ideologies, political parties, and bureaucracies. The problem-causing order in society is viewed as being resistant to change. However, this school holds an idealistic view that historical forces can change existing social problems. An example of this could be a new "Great Awakening," which would

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[9]Robert K. Merton and Robert A. Nisbet, Contemporary Social Problems (New York: Harcourt, Brace, Jovanovich, 1971) pp. 1-28.

[10]Armand L. Mauss, Social Problems As Social Movements (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975) p. 27.

alter societal beliefs and values, allowing the Church to be a major change agent within society.

The Symbolic Interactionalism School. The symbolic interactionalism or ethnomethodological school focuses primarily on asocial behavior and how, through daily interactions and communications, people tend to shape each other and the society in which they live. This school is interested in why a society considers certain behaviors or values as "normal." A key concept is labeling - i.e., assigning a negative status to a person, because in some way the person doesn't meet societal expectations. An example could be medical neglect of the elderly patient in a hospital, legitimated by the unconscious notions of either labeling the person as "useless" or "beyond help," or blocking out the person who is representative of the inevitability of old age and death. Goffman, Anselm and Strauss, whose theories are discussed in chapter two, are representative of this school of thought.

The Neoconservative School. Neoconservatists appear to draw on all three of the preceding theories of sociology. Etzioni points out that the neoconservatives attribute all social problems to a break-down of authority in: (1) individual conduct: (2) processes and agencies of social control: and, (3) societal moral order.[11] Theorists purport that this authority (i.e., stability) is disrupted by rapid social change and a lack of consensus within society in regard to ultimate values and beliefs. The school gives essentially no

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[11]Amitai Etzioni, Social Problems (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1976) p. 12.

attention to individuals within society, but deals with society as an entity.

The sociological bias of this paper is decidedly the conflict approach. However, in analyzing causal factors of death denial in chapter two, all four approaches or schools of thought are utilized to validate the hypothesis set forth by conflict theorist Richard Kalish.

Format

The paper is written basically in two parts. Chapters two through four serve to facilitate an understanding of the social climate in which the Church is called to ministry and the sociological interpretations of how the faith process evolves and functions within persons. The disciplines of sociology, theology, and history are drawn upon, with social ethics implicitly conveyed within this section of the paper. The aims of the first part of the paper are: (1) to provide integrated, foundational information concerning the Church and society in regard to the resurgent societal interests in death and dying issues; (2) to provide an apologetic for the thesis of this paper in regard to the impotency of the Church in mediating dying and death within society at this present time; (3) to formulate a viable theology for dying which elucidates scripture and Wesleyan theology, as an appropriate response from the Church to the contemporary secular interests in thanatology; and, (4) to stimulate the reader to responsibly think through (theologize-on) the meanings of death and its eschatological dimensions, in order to appropriate the tenets of faith in everyday life, and assist

others in understanding and appropriating what the gospel of Jesus Christ has to say about the meanings of life directed towards death.

The second part of the paper, chapters five and six, is a practical "how-to" guide, addressing implementation of a theology for dying and death education programming within the local church. The suggested programs are presented not to be determinative, but rather to invite further amendment, innovation, and amelioration to meet the particular needs of individual congregations. Two exemplary case studies and Howard J. Clinebell, Jr.'s "How To Set Up and Lead A Grief Recovery Group" comprise the appendices.

Chapter Outline

The sociological analysis of the American culture's particular interests in thantological issues is addressed in chapter two by integration of principles from basic sociology and the sub-disciplines of the sociology of medicine, the sociology of religion, and the sociology of knowledge. A criterion for the analysis is delineated, and current hypotheses on the cause(s) of a death phobia are evaluated. Richard Kalish's sociological hypothesis of the resurgent emphasis on death is presented as the hypothesis which meets the criterion outlined, and each facet of Kalish's hypothesis is analyzed and validated. Civil religious and humanistic views are presented in contrast to basic Christian beliefs. The focal concerns of the chapter are: (1) the causal factors of America's death phobia; (2) interest groups which have developed thanatological concerns into a social movement; (3) ethical considerations; and, (4) the challenge to the Church to respond

to what may be a counter-phobic reaction to death among secular thanatologists.

Chapter three concerns the Church's role as socializing agent in matters concerning death. The chapter relies on Peter Berger's sociological understanding of the faith process - i.e., how individuals appropriate faith and what it means, sociologically, to be a Christian in contemporary society. In past centuries Christianity was considered a norm in America, England, and many European countries. Today, a Christian is no longer a norm, but rather a deviant segment within society. Sociological givens, such as plausibility structure, alienation, theodicy and owned-meaning, are delineated. The focus is on making death make sense, sociologically, within Western culture. Early Church premises on death and theodicy are reviewed within the context of the shifting of theological views and a reorientation of theodicy to anthropodicy. Modern theologies and their relevance to death are discussed. The chapter closes with Berger's challenge to theologians to develop a relevant, anthropological theology that breathes forth transcedental signals of God calling to humanity, wooing humanity, with humanity trying to respond to those signals.

Chapter four establishes a criterion for formulating a theology of death and constructs the framework for the theological axis of the paper. The criterion centers on: the four United Methodist guidelines for theologizing; the integration of those guidelines into Berger's challenge for an anthropological theology which points to transcedental signals; and, the requisite for a theology which negates or neutralizes the tension maintained between theodicy

and anthropodicy.

In order to establish a scripturally-based theological core, the chapter examines the concepts of immortality and afterlife in Ancient Near Eastern literature, the Old Testament and New Testament canons, and the rabbinical writings demonstrating evolvement of a synthesis of the doctrines of immortality and resurrection which culminates in the Johannine relational theology. The theological arguments set forth are greatly dependent upon Helmut Thielicke's interpretations of Johannine eschatological thought. The model of God is God as transformer. Jesus Christ is the means for that transformation. Eternal life is both a quality of life and an actuality which commences during earthly existence in relationship with God through Jesus the Christ. It is celebrated and proclaimed within the life of the community of faith. The theology is shown to be reflective of Wesleyan theology and thought. The chapter closes with a seeking out, within the theology, the transcendental signals which reflect God's belief in humanity - God's wooing in the world and humanity's attempts to respond to, or reflect, the transcendent.

The fifth chapter concerns parish possibilities for integrating a theology for dying and living within the local parish. This chapter relies on the writer's personal experiences in ministry within the local church. Parish possibilities which are addressed include: working with the Worship Commission to develop a funeral guide; the study of the funeral as a worship service; liturgical possibilities; integration within confirmation studies for children, youth and young adults; and, means to desensitize persons to guilt, dying and death.

Examples are given. Implicit within the chapter is a challenge to pastors to seek out parishioners' views on dying, congregational needs, and possibilities for providing a balanced theology, which will meet the needs of parishioners and counter-balance secular or civil-religious views on death.

The last chapter concerns conducting a death and dying workshop within the local parish. The chapter is a practical "how-to," which presents three workshop models and considers context, leadership requirements, planning, workshop agendas, possible "snafus," follow-up work, and feedback. Materials are retrieved from chapters two through five for utilization in the workshop models, and additional resources are noted. The workshop provides a means for allowing parishioners and persons from the community to gain insight on the Church's understandings of the meanings of life, dying, and death, as well as serving as a forum where persons can dialogue about dying and begin to theologize about personal death, and gain an awareness of how to minister to terminally ill persons, assisting those persons in coping with terminal illness and dying. Practical aspects of theologizing about one's death, such as writing a will and providing a guide on funeral preferences for the family, are highlighted within the workshop.

Three appendices conclude the paper. The appendices include two case studies and a "how-to" guide for presenting a grief and bereavement workshop. The first case study concerns ministry with a non-parish family from the time family members attended a workshop, through the terminal illness, death and bereavement of a family

member. The workshop and follow-up counseling provided a means for this family to cope with death and served to incorporate the family within a parish.

The second case study recalls an extemporaneous mini-workshop presented for senior high youth and young adults during a crisis resulting from the accidental death of senior high youth.

In dialoguing with parishioners, or in the course of a workshop, it may become apparent that there is a need for grief recovery work with persons who have not been able to cope with the death of significant persons within their lives. Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. has developed a guide for setting up and leading a grief recovery group. With Dr. Clinebell's permission, and out of his concern for providing assistance to persons in ministry within the local parish, the article is included "en toto" with resource recommendations.

The intention of this paper is to provide banners, credible banners of faith, which can be put into the hands of persons as they walk inevitably towards death. Banners which will make life eternally significantly, enabling Christians to live life fully and courageously without a phobic fear of death. . . . Most of all, the ambition of this paper is that readers might be reminded that Christianity and the Church have a powerful message concerning the meanings of life, dying, and death, a message of the God who can be trusted in both life and death.

Chapter 2

CAUSAL FACTORS IN CULTURAL
ATTITUDES TOWARDS DEATH

Within the vast proliferation of death and dying materials

there are two consistent presuppositions which wave like flags of the

fleet: (1) that the American culture denies and fears death, reacting

to death with counter-phobic behaviors;[1] and, (2) that the Church no

longer serves the modern individual who seeks to understand the mean-

ing(s) of death.[2] The common denominator linking these two presupposi-

tions is that both the American culture and Church are part of the

American society, the American way of life. These presuppositions

appear to indicate two, interrelated social problems, both indicative

of mutually reciprocatory deficiencies within society - i.e., the im-

potency of the Church reinforces the death fear within culture and

visa-versa.

Peter Berger states that as long as persons die there will be

need for religion. Berger asserts that it is religion's charge to

mediate the meanings of life and death to individuals and to their

society.[3] If the Church is to be part of a society, yet have the onus

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[1] Lloyd R. Bailey, Sr., Biblical Perspectives on Death (Phila-
delphia: Fortress Press, 1979) p. 3; Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, On Death
and Dying (New York: Macmillan, 1969) p. 15; David E. Stannard, The
Puritan Way of Death (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) p. 193.

[2] Bailey, p. 4; Milton McC. Gatch, Death (New York: Seabury
Press, 1969) p. 16; Kübler-Ross, pp. 14-15; Stannard pp. 194, 230.

[3] Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy (Garden City, NY: Doubleday,
1967) p. 80.

upon it to mediate the meanings of life and death within that society, then there must be an understanding of: (1) the causal factors in America's death phobia, if indeed a death phobia exists; and, (2) how, sociologically, the Church (or religion) functions to provide meaning in the lives of the individuals who comprise a society - i.e., the Church's role in death and dying ministry. The task of this chapter is to set forth an understanding of the causal factors of a death phobia by means of developing a criterion for examining the causal factors of a death phobia, comparing current hypotheses to that criterion, and analyzing hypothetical materials in order to establish the source(s) and force(s) of that phobia, and, then, determine what it means for the Church.

CRITERION FOR A HYPOTHESIS

A viable hypothesis on the causal factors of a death phobia within American culture should have, as a criterion, the following: (1) data which demonstrates that a death phobia does exist within the American culture; (2) identifiable factors involved in the phobia; (3) provide a means to empirically validate those factors and their functioning mechanisms; and, (4) a relevant message to convey to the Church in regard to the Church's ministry in the area of death and dying.

CURRENT HYPOTHESES

Psychoanalytical Theory

Many of the hypotheses addressing America's death phobia have emanated from the discipline of psychoanalytical psychiatry. Although

these hypotheses deny Freud's assumption that individuals are incapable of accepting their own death,[4] the hypotheses attribute the phobia to a "psychic numbing," which is universal and historical in nature.[5] As pointed out by Lloyd R. Bailey, Sr., this can't be validated.[6] This group of hypotheses usually address deviant behavior arising from the problems of death anxiety, rather than dealing with death anxiety as it prevails within "normative," healthy persons.

Evolutional-Education Theory

Another type of hypothesis sets forth the notion of an evolutional-educational model as the source of the resurgent interest in death. This theory, or model, finds a correlative relationship between generalized sex education and generalized death education - i.e., as soon as a child learns where it came from the child will want to know about the culmination point towards which life moves.[7] This group of hypotheses implies that there is hierarchical order of taboos in a society, though the origins of those taboos or their functions are

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[4]Sigmund Freud, "Thoughts for the Times on War and Death," in his Standard Edition of the Complete Works (London: Hogarth Press, 1957) XIV, 289.

[5]Robert J. Lifton, "The Sense of Immortality: On Death and the Continuity of Life," in Herman Feifel (Ed.), New Meanings of Death (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977) pp. 273-288.

[6]Bailey, p. 3.

[7]D. H. Penniston, "The Importance of Death Education in Family Life," Family Coordinator XI (1962) 15-18; Daniel Leviton, "Education for Death," Journal of Health, Physical Education, Recreation XL (1969) 46-51.

not considered. Once society takes on a prevailing taboo, such as sex, the society then proceeds to tackle the next greater taboo - i.e., death. The promoters of this type of a hypothesis do not attempt to validate the historicity of the thesis. This type of thesis assumes that "good, ole American know-how" can tackle and whip any problem, without always considering the complexity of childhood responses to death. Like the first group of hypotheses, the evolutional-educational theory doesn't consider the role of the Church in mediating the meanings of life and death.

Sociological Theory

One hypothesis appears to meet the criterion. This hypothesis, judging by the lack of response to it in the journals, apparently has received little attention from the academic communities. The hypothesis, developed by sociologist Richard Kalish, has an anchor in research, and is supported by research from other disciplines. Kalish's study is rooted in an American research project conducted in 1966. The results of that study indicated that "dying persons are more to be avoided as friends, neighbors, or even visitors in the country than are Negroes, Mexican-Americans, Jews or other discriminated against minority groups."[8] In that study Kalish confirmed that persons who symbolized death are stigmatized to a greater degree than are ethnic minorities. A later study conducted by Kalish and Reynolds indicated

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[8]Richard A. Kalish, "The Effects of Death Upon the Family," in L. Pearson (Ed.) Death and Dying (Cleveland: Press of Western Reserve University, 1969) p. 82.

that within ethnic minority groups in the United States there is little variance in the psychocultural response to death and terminally-ill persons.[9]

Kalish's hypothesis is: The worship of the Judaic-Christian God was replaced, to a great extent in our Western technological society, by the worship of materialistic goods and services, with education, knowledge, and technological advances becoming secondary gods. However, the materialistic goods and services and the secondary gods could not be worth achieving, or enjoyed, unless individuals could realize the affluence of bodily health. Prior to the second decade of this century, individuals were forced to give considerable thought to life and death in the wake of multiple communicable diseases that devastated the population. When public health measures limited the spread of communicable diseases, the traditional priesthood lost its debilitated grasp on society. The traditional priesthood (i.e., the Church and clergy) was replaced by the priesthood of physicians who claimed their new role as conquerors of death, and even adapted part of the ancient clerical garb. The American physicians, or priests, became the lead pretenders in the cultural response to death. Kalish equates the present revolt against physicians (e.g., parapsychology, malpractice suits, and complaints about health care) with the revolt razed against the clergy when the Church failed during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries to meet societal needs and expectations.[10]

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[9]Richard A. Kalish and D. K. Reynolds, Death and Ethnicity (Los Angeles: University of Southern California Press, 1976) p. 28.

[10]Kalish, "The Effects of Death. . .," pp. 82-85.

ANALYSIS OF KALISH'S HYPOTHESIS

Kalish's hypothesis, which is compacted into one short article, is so loaded that it requires subdivision for analysis. Components within the hypothesis include: (1) a priesthood of physicians has replaced the traditional priesthood as conquerors of death; (2) the dying person is stigmatized; (3) there is rebellion against the medical profession because of its inability to conquer death; (4) technology is viewed as the mediator of extended life, or possibly immortality; (5) the Church no longer has a grasp on society; and, (6) subjectivism, or "me-ism," with an emphasis on how materialistic goods and the secondary gods can be subjectively enjoyed, is a key factor in culture.

Each of these components is significant in grasping an understanding of the American cultural response to death, and there is substantial material to validate Kalish's claims. To demonstrate the timeliness of Kalish's assertions, "subjectivism" is the first component to be addressed, then the other five components are addressed sequentially.

Subjectivism

The front page of the second section in a major California newspaper recently headlined the lead article "American Dream for the 80's." The article concerned a review of previous decades and a forecast of the social climate for the 1980's. The forecast was developed by Florence Skelly, executive vice president of Yankelovich, Skelly, and White, Inc., a nationally known research firm in New York. Skelly reflected on the

1950's as a decade of high consumer optimism. During the 1960's, young

people began questioning the basic and traditional American sociological

values, challenging upward mobility and questioning the "Puritan ethic

that denied individual whims in favor of larger social units - the fam-

ily, country and community."[11] Self-fulfillment became the new mean-

ingful goal. By the mid-1970's, only about eighteen percent of the

people in America strongly supported old values.[12]

Skelly noted that the focus on self is still a predominant

American value; we have a duty to ourselves to live the full, rich

life. "Introspection," says Skelly, "has become a billion dollar in-

dustry and a dominant focus of the media. The media constantly gives

tests that one takes to find out if one is happy, fulfilled, a good sex

partner. . . ."[13] Based on fifteen years of marketing research, Skelly

projected themes that are likely to be vital during the 1980's. Each

of these themes centers on the beautiful person living the full, rich

life. At the top of her list of themes for this decade is romance

with one's body. Included in the themes are correlative themes, such

as sexual identify, freedom to marry and divorce, materialism, consum-

erism and promotion of technological advances to enhance the rich life.[14]

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[11]Jo Ann Miner, "American Dream for the 80's," Register (Santa
Ana, CA), (September 29, 1980) p. D-1, col. 1.

[12]Miner, ibid.

[13]Miner, cols. 1-2.

[14]Miner, cols. 2-4.

Milton Gatch has observed that the chief problem of humanity in our modern world is the fact that the individual is trapped by self and subjectivity.[15] Romance with the body. . . . On to Kalish's thoughts on the new priesthood, the technological guides who could, supposedly, provide "care" for the blemishes of the diseased body, blemishes such as terminal illness or old age which could chill any romance!

The New Priesthood

Kalish's notion that physicians became the lead pretenders in the cultural response to death is sustained in research completed by Herman Feifel. A study conducted in 1967 by Feifel and his colleagues showed that medical school students and physicians are significantly more fearful of death than lay persons in the same research grouping. The study suggests that these professionals had an early traumatic experience with death and entered medicine to compensate for that fear.[16] William May complements Feifel's study, noting that death is viewed as the cardinal enemy of the physician, an evil to be eradicated by the profession which conducts itself under a messianic pretense, and, at the same time, "acts out" the death fears common to the pro-fession.[17] May's analysis of the physicians' role in death denial in

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[15]Gatch, p. 181.

[16]Herman Feifel, "Physicians Consider Death," Proceedings of the American Psychological Association (1967) 201.

[17]William F. May, "The Sacral Power of Death in Contemporary Experience," in Arien Mack (Ed.) Death in American Experience (New York: Schocken Books, 1973) pp. 120-123.

American culture appears as a scathing indictment. However, May (and Kalish) are supported by other observers and researchers.

Eric Cassell, M.D., notes that physicians are socialized during their professionalization to be primarily "curers," not "carers," because medical school faculties have regarded death in euphemisms, and issues related to death have been regarded as appropriate not for medicine, but for the discipline of philosophy. Death is not perceived as fitting into the analytical thought required for technological (i.e., curative) medicine.[18] Another physician, Neil Elliot, has commented that even aging has come to be regarded as another disease to be cured.[19]

Death, itself, has been taken on as a disease, another acute illness to be conquered, rather than being considered by physicians to be a natural biological phenomena.[20] Researcher Colin Parkes notes that physicians and researchers, unable to empirically validate a technological reason for cancer, have sought to explain the disease as a psychosomatically induced disease, the "cancer personality," which Parkes refutes as unfounded dogma.[21]

Feifel has stated the case most succinctly in his comment that physicians must save lives at any cost, including the costs of the

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[18]Eric Cassell, "Being and Becoming Dead," in Mack, p. 162.

[19]Neil Elliot, The Gods of Life (New York: Macmillan, 1973) p. 95.

[20]Talcott Parsons, et. al., "The Gift of Life and Its Reciprocation," in Mack, p. 22; Judith P. Swazey, The Courage to Fail (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974) p. 320

[21]Colin M. Parkes, Bereavement (New York: International Universities Press, 1972) p. 22.

patients' sociological and psychological well-being.[22] The psychological or sociological "costs" inflicted on terminal persons can be determined by evaluating a person's social identity - i.e., how others perceive or valuate those persons, as in Kalish's study involving the terminally ill and ethnic minorities.

Stigma

The Greek word "stigma" originally referred to burnt or carved body markings applied to runaway slaves or prisoners. However, such markings were ritualistically inflicted upon persons in ancient religious orders as well. Although "momos" was indicted to denote shame, stigma was, on occasion, also used to indicate a blemish, such as in the case of a leper. St. Paul added a symbolic dimension to the word stigma in Galatians 6:17 when he spoke of the marks of Christ in his body - i.e., denoting both personal abuse and leperous rejection.

Erving Goffman grasped the fullness of the Pauline meaning when he referred to the stigmatized person as having a spoiled identity, which reduces the individual in the minds of other "from a whole and usual person to a tainted, discounted one."[23] Using Goffman's definition of "stigma" as an anchor point, the stigmatization of the terminally ill becomes apparent. Goffman notes that the special situation of the stigmatized is that society tells him/her that he/she is a

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[22]Herman Feifel, "Death in Contemporary America," in his New Meanings of Death, p. 7.

[23]Erving Goffman, Stigma (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall 1963) p. 67.

member of the wider group, which means that the person is a normal human being, but the person is also different, and the difference can't be denied. The person stigmatized in adulthood has a greater problem with "reidentity," and is prone to develop a disapproval of himself/herself. As a result of a perceived stigma, an adult may move through five progressive stages, or become stinted in any one of the stages which represent an attempt by the stigmatized person to reconcile himself/herself to a spoiled identity that causes persons within society to look down upon or to shun the stigmatized person.

The five stages are: (1) denying the stigma exists; (2) becoming defensive about the conditon causing the stigma; (3) becoming isolated - i.e., alienated; (4) seeking a means to correct the objective basis for the failure to be acceptable to others; and, (5) reconciling oneself to the stigma and accepting the stigma as a fact.[24] There appears to be a striking parity between Goffman's description of the process stigmatized persons move through in trying to cope with and accept a stigma and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross' five classic emotional stages or phases observed in the dying. Kübler-Ross' awareness stages are: (1) denial; (2) anger; (3) bargaining; (4) despair; and, (5) acceptance.[25]

Parsons, Fox and Lidz note that the emotional reactions (or stages of awareness) in Kübler-Ross' paradigm are not compatible within Judeo-Christian traditions and non-industrialized societies.[26] What

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[24]Goffman, pp. 100-109.

[25]Kübler-Ross, pp. 38-112.

[26]Parsons, pp. 22-26.

I am suggesting is: Kübler-Ross' observed stages of awareness could have been reflections of stigma-induced states experienced by the dying persons in response to reactions from significant persons in their environment, including those in the medical profession and the dying person's social network of family and friends.

Research concerning the social role of the terminally ill in regard to health care reinforces both Kalish's notion of stigmatization and Feifel's assertion of the doctors' quest for providing physical immortality. Russell Noyes and John Clancy in a recent journal article note that today dying persons have no well-defined social role. They are cast into a "sick role," and are treated with vigorous treatment which is appropriate for the acutely ill, not the dying.[27]

Glaser and Strauss have completed extensive research concerning the social network between terminal patients and the medical staffs in hospitals. The results of those studies substantiate the notion that the techniques of medicine and nursing are designed to care for the acutely ill, not the dying patient. Glaser and Strauss charge that the majority of American physicians resist telling a patient that he/she is dying. Rather, a game termed "closed awareness" is initiated by the physician, staff and family, whereby the patient is given a "fictitious future biography." This is carried out by telling the patient how well he/she looks, or making references to future holidays.[28]

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[27]Russell Noyes, Jr. and John Clancey, "The Dying Role: Its Relevance to Improved Patient Care," Psychiatry XL (1977) 41.

[28]Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, Awareness of Dying (Chicago: Aldine Press, 1965) pp. 30-42.

David Sudnow comments that when it becomes obvious that a patient will not recover, the hospital staff projects a "social death" unto the patient, regarding the person as already dead.[29]

Jane Brodie notes that cancer patients sent home from the hospital between treatments perceive that they are shunned by friends. Spouses and other family members appear to avoid physical contact, avoid undue or meaningful conversations, lock the medicine cabinets, and hide knives, razors and scissors. Recovered cancer patients perceived that when they returned to former jobs that, in spite of qualifications and a clean bill of health, they experienced discrimination in reduction of responsibilities and cessation in promotions.[30]

(This perceived altered social status is not unique to cancer patients. During death and dying workshops and follow-up counseling sessions, persons who have had heart attacks and strokes related similar experiences to me. One man who had suffered a heart attack eighteen years ago in the Midwest, finally moved to California to establish a new identity. Unable to obtain employment, because of his health record, he founded his own firm. A woman with an inoperable heart condition shared how her family seemed to shrink-away when she touched them. A middle-aged family man suffering with cancer interrupted a workshop segment one evening to share with everyone how great he felt the day he was able to tell his doctor to take the nitrogen-mustard and go to hell,

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[29]David Sudnow, Passing On (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1967) pp. 88-90.

[30]Jane E. Brodie, You Can Fight Cancer and Win (New York: Quadrangle, 1977) pp. 196, 223.

that either he and the doctor would honestly manage his treatment to-
gether, or else there would be no treatment.)

Rebellion Against the Medical Profession

As noted by Kalish, the medical priests, like the sixteenth and
seventeenth century traditional priests, failed to meet societal ex-
pectations. The twentieth century failure to provide for immortality
to complement materialistic and technological achievements, aggravated
by the spiraling costs of medical care, has led to an anti-medical soc-
cial movement.

Ethicists and others involved in this anti-medical movement
are questioning the physicians' role as technological masters who de-
cide how and when death will claim a person. As death shifted from a
moral to a technological sphere with physicians prolonging life, a
legal redefinition of death became requisite. Segments of society
are reacting, as evidenced by the "Patient's Rights" and "Living
Will" legislation.[31] Even "Dear Abby" has gotten on this bandwagon!
In a recent column, Abigail Van Buren advised persons who desire not
to have prolongation of life in the case of a terminal, irreversible
illness to make out a "living will." Prepared forms and guidelines
specifically meeting requirements of state laws can be obtained, Abby
noted, by a small donation to cover the cost of postage from: The
Society for the Right to Die, 250 West 57th Street, New York, New

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[31]Robert M. Veatch, Death, Dying and the Biological Revolution
(New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) pp. 114-116.

York 10019.[32]

Technological Immortality

Still another group within society, a group which hasn't lost faith in the medical profession or technology, is seeking an alternative course of action in response to a quest for immortality. Cryogenics is the rapid freezing of the still-warm corpse. The corpse is maintained in a frozen state in the hope that medical "know-how," at a future date, will provide a means for revival and rejuvenation of the corpse. Dr. R. W. C. Elliot, a proponent of cryogenics, has declared that not only is rejuvenation possible (via cryogenics), but immortality, itself, is a reasonable goal.[33]

Technology appears to be an appropriate agent, in Dr. Elliot's view for mediating immortality. Lloyd R. Bailey, Sr. says "death has become God."[34]

The Old Priesthood: The Church

Kalish appears to take for granted that the Church has no grasp on society. David Stannard states: "It is an unargued assumption . . . that religion has lost much of its power to comfort or frighten the modern individual contemplating the meaning of death."[35]

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[32]Abigail Van Buren, "Dear Abby," Register (Santa Ana, CA), (August 3, 1980) p. I-1, col. 1.

[33]Elliot, p. 173.

[34]Bailey, p. 4.

[35]Stannard, p. 38.

Gatch notes that there is within society an idea of immortality, which is supposedly of Christian origin. But, this ideology is held by persons who aren't affiliated with a Christian church. He refers to this phenomena as being part of the well-institutionalized civil religion which exists within our society.[36] Studies conducted several years ago by Lloyd Warner and his colleagues in a New England city substantiate Gatch's assertion. Warner cites the Memorial Day services as typical of civil religion which carries a sacred symbolism. The ceremony provides for solidarity, communicating a sense of triumph over death in the midst of the Memorial Day ritualism. The dead are held up as an example of those who have gone on to immortality. Warner adds that as the Church and its symbols have become more irrelevant, undertakers have assumed parapriestly functions.[37]

Although the notions of civil religion and the parapriestly function of the undertaker are still evident, a case could be made for the collapse of both civil religion and the parapriestly role of the undertaker. Since Viet Nam and Watergate, the red, white, and blue has been replaced by causes and "me-ism," with little, if any, attention allotted to civil religious or nationalistic sympathies. The effects of Jessica Mitford's expose of the funeral industry can't be measured, but Mitford evidently caused shock waves within consumerism. Mitford is quoted in a consumer handbook produced by the federal

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[36]Gatch, p. 11.

[37]Lloyd Warner, The Living and the Dead (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1961) p. 217.

government. The consumer handbook, prepared by the Seattle Regional Office of the Federal Trade Commission, is a consumer guide for funerals, cemeteries, and grave markers.[38] And, the rise of the "Neptune Society" and burial mutuals has forced undertakers to offer economy fares. The Neptune Society provides for immediate disposal of the body (usually by cremation and the scattering of the ashes) for a nominal fee. Interested persons are encouraged by the Society to hold a membership within the Society and to make advanced arrangements in writing. However, the Society will, if possible, care for the remains of non-members upon the request of the family of the deceased.

If civil religion and/or undertakers assumed part of the Churchly role in regard to death, it appears that neither has fared well during recent years.

The Mainstream Protestant Church

Stannard echoes the thesis of this paper in stating:

In recent years there has been a vast proliferation of advice literature and of social organizations for the dying and the bereaved, as well as of programs and seminars in hospitals that attempt to come to grips with the modern meaning of death. But admirable and hopeful as much of this activity may be, it is in itself powerful testimony to the fact that death has left modern man reeling in confusion and in need of a third alternative between denial and grotesquerie.[39]

The third alternative is the Church, which has taken a back seat as secular attempts have been made to cope with a death phobia,

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[38]The Price of Death (Seattle: Seattle Regional Office, Federal Trade Commission, 1975).

[39]Stannard, pp. 194-195.

and undertakers and funeral homes assumed the funeral functions once fulfilled by the clergy and the Church.

Stannard notes that contemporary man is forced, in the face of death, to choose between outright avoidance or a secularized masquerade. Modern, technological life is deprived of ultimate meaning in life or death. In the past, the community provided meaning through identity, cohesion and support; the community mourned the loss of a person to death and nurtured the bereaved. Now when a person dies, the immediate family suffers the full impact of loss, often without the support of clergy or even the Christian community. Whereas religion previously served to suppress the bewilderment, fear and emptiness of death, there no longer exists the vision of the mystical, but literal, afterlife to provide solace for modern individuals and families who face death.[40]

Having reviewed and verified the components within Kalish's hypothesis, the remainder of this chapter concerns a final analysis of Kalish's work and an assessment of what the hypothesis and the analysis of it means to the Church.

DEATH PHOBIA AS A SOCIAL MOVEMENT

To facilitate an understanding of a final analysis of Kalish's hypothesis, it is essential for the reader to have a grasp on sociological givens in regard to a social movement. Kalish inferred that technology induced a social movement, and physicians assumed the role of lead actors in that movement. Blumer defines social movements as: "col-

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[40]Stannard, pp. 194-195.

lective enterprises to establish a new order of life. They have their

inception in the condition of unrest and derive their motive power . . .

from dissatisfaction . . . from hopes for a new scheme . . . of living."[41]

Requisites for a Social Movement

Sociologist Neil Smelser, in researching the genesis of soc-

ial movements, points out that six conditions must be in motion in society

in order to stimulate a durable social movement. The factors or conditions

are: (1) structural conduciveness; (2) structural strain; (3) the growth

and spread of any generalized belief; (4) special precipitating factors;

(5) the mobilization of participants; and, (6) facilitative processes in the

social control system.[42] The first two factors are mandatory; the third

provides the nucleus for the movement; and, the last three conditions

merely piggy-back to provide steam for the movement.

Strain refers to inconsistencies between the ideal and reality -

i.e., the ways things are and the way people want them to be. Strain

could also arise from ambiguities and discrepancies in the normative

system - e.g., inability of the Church to provide meanings for life

and death. This is linked to generalized belief, public opinion, and it

can be either hostile or a form of wish-fulfillment.[43] Hostility

could be represented in the anti-medical movement; wish-fulfillment

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[41]Herbert Blumer,"Social Problems as Collective Behavior," Social Problems XVIII (Winter 1971) 298-306.

[42]Neil J. Smelser, A Theory of Collective Behavior (New York: Free Press, 1962) Chapter 5.

[43]Smelser, Chapters 9-10.

could be the desire among individuals to be immortal. Special pre-
cipitating factors would be whatever would make public opinion appear
to have some basis or credibility, providing for mobilization of par-
ticipants and facilitative processes to get a movement rolling. What
Smelser is saying, essentially, is that societal changes don't birth
overnight. Major societal changes are heralded by a social movement,
and many factors must interact and brew over a period of time before
the factors are bonded together by the growth and dissemination of a
generalized belief.

The Paradigm

When the first three requisites of Smelser's theory are applied
to Kalish's hypothesis and historical factors are considered, the re-
sult is the following paradigm:

Conditions	Historical Factors
1. Structural conduciveness	Rise of technology and economic promise. The need for bodily affluence to benefit from materialistic goods and services, and to make the achievement of the secondary gods worthwhile. The availability of physicians to assume the lead role in promising bodily affluence.
2. Structural Strain	Medieval Christianity's stress on a wrathful God. The scientific revolution beginning in the seventeenth century set forth the universe as impersonal and made humanity the final link in an evolutionary chain. Humanity was on its own, needing to rely on knowledge, science, and skill to survive. Pluralism within the Church

Conditions	Historical Factors
2. Structural Strain	and a weakening in membership requirements. Secularization of the Church. Higher criticism and the professionalization of scientifically-trained clergy. Devastation of World War I; mortality of war and violence, followed by the psychic enervation of the Depression.
3. Growth/Spread of Belief	Technology and its mistress, medicine, halting killer communicable diseases. Professionalization and enhanced social status of doctors (vs. former status as barbers). Possibility of technology and medicine eradicating all diseases, immortality possibly feasible. Legitimation of medical technology via the media, government-backing of medical insurance programs, utilization of medical services. Increasing economic prosperity.

The fourth condition, special precipitating factors, would include: the rise of urban centers with greater impersonalism than in rural towns; the rise of the funeral industry taking away the reality of death and combining with urban impersonalism to cause the shock of death to impact on the immediate family, rather than on the whole community; and, hospitals becoming the loci for dying, with isolation of the terminally ill from families and society. Special precipitating factors would be reinforced by World War II, new medical discoveries, greater materialistic affluence and leisure allowing for time and money to be focused subjectively, but with the reminders of death in natural disasters.

Mobilization of participants and the facilitative processes

(Smelser's last two conditions) would be reflective of the previous four conditions - i.e., they would draw motive power from the crystallization of those four conditions. Fragmentation would result when a substantial number of persons within society perceive that the social movement is not meeting their expectations (i.e., immortality), and those persons are able to relate the insufficiency of the cause to society-at-large. When that occurs, structural conduciveness and strain have already set in, and the stage is set for the genesis of a new social movement, such as rebellion against the medical establishment, with an emphasis on health foods and folk cures; seeking alternate burial and funeral practices; development of secular groups to mediate the meaning of dying and death; and/or, a turning towards the occult, parapsychological, or a transformed technological hope in order to make sense out of dying and death.

SUMMARY

The purpose of this chapter has been to set forth a hypothesis of the genesis of both the current death denial in society and the recent moves within secular society to provide a means for persons to cope with dying and death. The implications within Kalish's hypothesis and the supporting materials are: For at least sixty years the Church has not had a grasp on society - i.e., the Church has not exerted a primary influence on persons in society or societal institutions in regard to conveying the meanings of life and death.

Different societies have tried to understand death and make it tolerable via religion. Religion conveyed the meaning, for indi-

viduals and for their societies, of life and the inevitability of death. Technology assumed the role of religion in conveying "life," by suggesting that perhaps mortality wasn't inevitable. The religious possibilities within technology became fused with civil religion and humanism. Whereas religion served as a process conveying meanings and symbols, which pointed humanity towards God, the syncretism of technology, civil religion and humanism centered on the goal of the rich, full life, with possible immortality. Christian symbols lost their meaning, and symbol confusion is manifested in society's seeking to find alternate means for coping with dying in the occult, parapsychology, and secular thanatological presentations.

SIGNIFICANCE TO CHURCH

Historically, the Church, as conveyer of the gospel, has offered individuals and society a particular view of reality. Within the twentieth century, that view of reality has often been sublimated by side-trips in the continued quest for the historical Jesus, vested interest theologies (e.g., "genitive" liberation theologies which emphasize particular groups rather than seeking a wholistic, humanistic theology which is gifted by particular group views), or social action programs. Good works and moralism have become, in themselves, an anchor, whereas the roots of Wesleyan faith demanded a foundation of faith (a stabilized belief and value system), from which good works and moral attitudes emanated. The Church is called to reclaim and to witness its central message of Christian reality, of what it means for individuals to live and die. The appropriate response for the Church

to make to the death phobia in American culture is to voice this Christian view of reality which is centered on the life, death and resurrection of Jesus the Christ, to make that reality available to persons within congregations and within the community. In the midst of confusion over values and beliefs, Christianity still has the evangel.

MOVING ON: A FOREWORD

Working from the sociological basis established in this chapter in regard to the sources and forces of the death phobia in American culture, the next step is seek an understanding of how, sociologically, the faith process evolves in individuals, in order to understand the complexities of the faith process and its relevance in formulating a theology of death.

Chapter 3

SOCIOLOGY, CHRISTIAN-THANATOLOGY
AND THE FAITH PROCESS

INTRODUCTION

Peter Berger asserts that death no longer makes sense in the West, because "religious traditions have lost their character as over-arching symbols for society at large, which must find its integrative symbols elsewhere."[1] Berger's sociological analyses of religion in regard to death provides valuable insights. The Rutgers professor has made a significant contribution to the Church in his understanding of the process(es) of interaction between individuals, society, and religion. For Berger the primary function of religion is to mediate a meaningful quality of life and death for individuals.

The Suprascientific Church

Scholar Jim A. Sanders has commented that to try to describe the Church by sociological means alone is "fallacious"; the Church, Christianity, is suprascientific. God broke into history to provide meaning and purpose for life - i.e., history has been the vehicle for faith. And God points to fact; facts don't point to God.[2] The genius of Sanders, the Old Testament scholar, and of the sociologist Berger

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[1]Peter Berger, The Sacred Canopy (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1967) p. 153.

[2]Jim A. Sanders, The Old Testament In the Cross (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1961) pp. 20, 24-25.

mesh into a partnership. Berger, drawing upon the sociology of knowledge and the conflict sociological theory, delineates how meaning and purpose of life are mitigated to individuals through the faith process. His work is not merely a description of the mechanical process; implicit to it is a challenge, always, to the Church to do that which it has been called to do. His challenge is especially relevant in this day when technology and empirical validations are considered to be like "sacred" values.

Berger's work carries a profound edict. In our pluralistic American culture, where the Church has become secularized, and values are in a state of flux, any group which takes its religious principles seriously must function as a deviant sector within society. Not just a deviant sector, but a cognitive minority or counter-culture movement with values, goals and motivations quite different from those held by the majority of individuals within the pluralistic American culture. . . "Pluralism," as used by Berger, does not refer to pluralism as it exists within one strain of religious thought - i.e., variations of practice among, say, mainline Protestant denominations. Pluralism, in the sociological context, refers to a variety of religious persuasions, including non-Christian faiths, socialism, humanism, Marxism, and narcissism. Berger's thoughts are relevant to this paper in that he presents the journey of faith as being both a process and a reality (or an altered consciousness of what constitutes reality).

A definition of religion, as drawn from Berger's works, takes on the following composite: Religion, or faith, is a suprascientific meaning system, which is shared and expressed; it is the establishment

through human activity of a sacred cosmos, which is then overlaid on the societal nomos, and is capable of maintaining itself in the ever present fact of chaos, especially death, providing a reality which goes beyond the societal nomos - i.e., the canopy of meaning provides attempts to make the whole universe humanly significant, giving meaning to human life within the collectivities, and effecting the minds, feelings, and the interrelationships between the believer and the society in which the believer lives.

The milestones for this chapter are: to elucidate that definition; to briefly review historical theological/sociological developments relevant to death; and, to set forth Berger's challenge to theologians to develop an anthropologically significant theology for our contemporary world, a theology of meaningful overarching symbols which are pertinent to individuals within American culture. The discussion in this chapter provides a foundation for developing a theology of death, sociologically and anthropologically - i.e., the sociological and anthropological givens discussed in this chapter will serve as a yard stick for evaluating the relevancy of a theology of death.

Berger's Perspective

For a non-catechumen in the disciplines of sociology and the philosophical sociology of knowledge, Berger is complex. Berger tries to correlate the empirically grounded sociology with social philosophy, but appears to do so at the expense of conventional sociological approaches. Berger's definition of the sociology of knowledge is: "the study of the relationship between human thought and the social

conditions under which it occurs."[3] Berger appears to be building upon and validating the thesis of Vilfredo Pareto.

FAITH, A SUPRASCIENTIFIC MEANING SYSTEM

In 1916 Vilfredo Pareto published his apologetic against Durkhim, Tyler, et. al. (religious anthropologists/sociologists) to establish that religion, especially primitive religion and religions of antiquity, are not society per se', psychologisms, a paternal ideal, or a "ghostly" idea generated by dreams. Religion is what religion does! Pareto set forth a basic sociology of knowledge, as it relates to any religion, by noting that there are certain elementary behaviors found in all societies in similar situations and directed towards similar objectives. The elementary behaviors (or "residues") are termed "non-logico." The non-logico doesn't imply pre-logical or illogical, but rather it represents expressive, or as Pareto terms it, "sentimental" aspects of humanity. Non-logico behavior is dependent only on experience and symbols. Ideologies change, but the sentiments that give rise to those ideologies remain basically unchanged - i.e., human nature, or the basic needs in human nature, are consistent. Non-logico behavior is intricately tied into thinking conditioned by symbols, and, according to Pareto, is the way to think religiously.

Humanity, conditioned also by logical thought, especially since the age of enlightenment, has tried to understand religion and religious behavior rationally by psychological or sociological

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[3]Peter Berger, A Rumor of Angels (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1970) p. 34.

means, which only deadend.[4] In short, symbols carried by tradition serve as non-logico indicators, with traditions providing a means for integration within the ongoing life of both the religious community and the believing individual. These non-logico indicators, which are seen in the ritual, creeds, and traditions, represent the deepest need of humanity, and the need for meaning in everyday life and history, especially in the face of chaos and death. They point to a source of ordering and strength which is greater than that known by humanity, even scientific humanity.

Pareto's thesis provides a basis for the notion that religion is suprascientific. In Jam A. Sander's terminology, "God points to facts." Doubt and faith are partners, because faith can't be empirically validated by the scientific method. But faith can be validated by concurrence of personal experience, conveyed historically. Faith (or religion) becomes fact not by empirical means; it is fact because it is validated expressively by human belief and individuals' perception, which effects the reality of the believer(s).

Socialization and Meaning

Berger maintains that religion provides a canopy of meanings for individuals.[5] These meanings protect the person from anomie. Anomie is a term coined by Durkheim in 1931. Basically, it conveys insur-

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[4] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, Theories of Primitive Religion (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965) pp. 92-99.

[5] Berger, The Sacred Canopy, Chapter 1.

mountable conflict and meaninglessness - i.e., chaos. Mauss' interpretation of Durkheim's intent with the word is: "Large numbers of people have become unsure of the culturally prescribed goals in life and the means. . . to obtain them. As a result, old definitions of right and wrong lose their power. . . ."[6] Anomie is indicative of either an individual's inability to integrate within society or of social disorganization. (This reflects the conflict approach in sociology which addresses both the individuals who comprise society and society as a whole.)

Society is always precarious. Socialization and social controls are required to ensure perpetuation of a society. A simplistic understanding of this socialization provides an understanding which can be transferred to the way a person learns and appropriates faith, and also provides insights on how religion functions within society. This socialization and social control are what Berger terms "world-building" and "world maintenance."[7] Humans, by their biological makeup, have the need to externalize, to express themselves. Collectively, this produces a world. The world (social structure and givens) attains the status of reality. That world, or social construction of what the world is, is perceived by persons as an objective reality, because the givens of that world are internalized during socialization. Socialization is achieved by means of a model which Berger terms the "fundamental

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[6]Armand L. Mauss, Social Problems As Social Movements (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1975) p. 28.

[7]Berger, The Sacred Canopy, Chapter 4.

dialectic."[8]

The Fundamental Dialectic

The dialectic is fundamental because this is the way social existences come into being, providing a social nomos. (Social nomos is the opposite of anomie; it conveys meaning, order, stability, and identification.) The dialectic and social nomos are usually stacked, unconsciously, in order to meet the needs of society and to ensure the perpetuation of the values cherished by a society. (An example of this could be a technologically-oriented society which places high value in the career development orientation of engineers, doctors and chemists, while assigning low value to dancers, theologians and artists. A better example is the aspirations of nineteenth century Japanese parents for their sons to be samurais.)

Building on theories of Hegel, Marx and George Mead, Berger developed a three-phase, sequential, intellectual model of the fundamental dialectic: Phase one is the externalizing human giving of himself/herself, sharing knowledge out of a basic need to give. Phase two is the objectivating phase, the taking of what has been received (via someone else's externalizing), and putting it to use, assigning it meaning so it becomes objective reality. This socially objectivated knowledge serves to explain what is happening in everyday life. Phase three, the internalization phase, entails integrating the externalized and objectivated knowledge into a familiar context so it makes sense and the

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[8]Berger, The Sacred Canopy, p. 4.

society in which one lives makes sense. This dialectic serves to legitimate the ways things are in a society. The dialectic provides plausibility structure (institutions in the society which seem plausible) or reality maintenance as long as enough people believe what they internalized during the socialization process. If historic circumstances are altered, or if for some reason the plausibility weakens, then changes occur within society, changes which lead to an alteration in the institutions which provide meaning for a society.[9]

Alienation and Dealienation

For Berger, a principle function of religion in a pluralistic society is the process of alienation. Individuals are created to be actors within a society, not bureaucratic puppets. Society isn't an entity in itself; society is people, people who are called to be participants in history, not machinery.[10] There is a part of human consciousness which remains non-socialized. Socialization, if total, would deny any fragment of individual personhood. The self, as an individual, has a portion of his/her consciousness which is estranged from socialization, which still seeks to quest for the meaning of everyday life, as well as death. In the socially constructed world, this quest for reality can lead to anomie. In religion, the sacred canopy of meanings forces the person to become consciously alienated.

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[9]Berger, The Sacred Canopy, Chapters 1 and 4.

[10]Peter Berger, Invitation to Sociology (New York: Doubleday, 1963) Chapter 6.

Alienation produces a false consciousness - i.e., religion declares a reality, a transcendent suprascientific reality, a reality other than the total reality of the technologically-bound empirical world.[11] In the reality of Christianity, the world is no longer a humanly-made world explained in terms that deny God. A Christian is a citizen of heaven and just a pilgrim on earth. That is, socially speaking, false consciousness, because human rationale knows the Christian to be a citizen here on earth, in America!

In the alienation process, the dialectical relationship between the individual and his/her society is lost in consciousness. The person, in ecstasy, stands outside of empirically defined reality and realizes an alternate consciousness that provides meaning and purpose for life. Then, the individual re-enters the empirically defined social order with a new set of values or a false consciousness. Alienation protects a person from anomie, because meaning proceeds from the transcendental acting in the social dimension of life. As this meanins is shared, it is further objectivated (i.e., imposes a common order upon) reality, becoming the official interpretation of reality within a group of like-minded believers. "Dealienating" is debunking empirical knowledge to align it with the alienated person's interpretation of reality.[12] Theodicy is key in the delienation process.

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[11]Berger, The Sacred Canopy, pp. 94, 98-99.

[12]Berger, The Sacred Canopy, Chapter 4.

Theodicy and Meaning

Theodicy represents the attempt to make a pact with death, to explain injustices and suffering. Theodicy provides a meaning system to explain evil, to explain why God allows evil in the world. An understanding of meaning is more important than transient happiness; happiness can be a pathological false consciousness, a mania or a drug induced state of mind. But, meaning provides a sense of stability, a purpose for life and its hardships or joys. According to Berger, theodicy provides the believer and the community of believers with at least one of three types of compensation for earthly suffering and demise:

(1) This-worldly   - anticipation of earthly reward in the not-too-distant future

(2) Other-worldly   - hope in a heavenly reward with an understanding after death of the inequities of earthly life.

(3) Dualistic   - expectation of some reward or benefit in this life, but true reward is in heaven after death.[13]

Negatively, theodicy can lead to religious masochism - e.g., rigorous asceticism or "just suffering for Jesus." Positively, theodicy provides the cognitive minority (i.e., the group of believers whose cognitive notions of reality are atypical from that of empirical society) with a sacredly significant meaning system.[14]

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[13]Berger, The Sacred Canopy, Chapter 3.

[14]Berger, The Sacred Canopy, pp. 163-164.

THE CHRISTIAN CANOPY

The Judeo-Christian tradition presented life as being sacredly significant and under the control of God, the Creator of the whole world. All history became sacred history, with human actors interacting with each other and with God on the earthly plane of the sacred cosmos. Via the fundamental dialectic (telling the sacred story), alienation, dealienation, and theodicy, a canopy of meanings was provided for believers. This canopy made death make sense to members within the sacred community.

The practices of the Qumran community indicate that this Jewish sect considered death inconsequential for persons initiated into their community. The Dead Sea scrolls evince that the conviction was held that when members were baptized into the community, those members passed from death and alienation from God into eternal life and communion with the angels. This realized eschatology was fused to a synthesis of the doctrines of immortality of the soul and resurrection of the body.[15] A dualistic theodicy was dominant in the Qumran meaning system, enervating anomie and fear of death.

Early Church Premises

The earliest Christian writers appear to have perpetuated a Qumran-flavored theodicy and synthesis of the doctrines of immor-

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[15]George Nickelsburg, Resurrection, Immortality, and Eternal Life in Intertestamental Judaism (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972) pp. 144, 154, 167.

tality of the soul and resurrection of the body. In his arguments against gnosticism, Irenaeus (130 - 200 A.D.) set forth a doctrine of body, soul, and spirit, a "recapitulation," or following of Christ's experience of death, descent to the place of dead souls, and resurrection.[16]

Tertullian (160 - 225 A.D.) assumed everyone knew about the doctrine of immortality of the soul, and tried to prooftext the doctrine of the resurrection. Tertullian's theology took on a predominant other-worldly theodicy with its emphasis on punishment of the soul in the intermediate state between death and the resurrection with actual judgment and reward not occurring until after the resurrection.[17]

Gregory of Nyssa (330 - 395 A.D.) set forth a clear synthesis of the doctrines of immortality of the soul and the future resurrection of the body in On the Soul and Resurrection. In the intermediate state following death, the treatise states that the good soul (i.e., the saved soul) moves towards the Godhead. In so doing, the soul is purged of evil, allowing both the soul and the body to stand incorruptible before God on judgment day and claim the righteousness of Christ.[18]

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[16]Irenaeus, "Against Heresies," V, xxx, in Ante-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973) I, 560-561.

[17]Tertullian, "A Treatise On the Soul," in Ante-Nicene Fathers III, 181-235; Tertullian, Concerning the Resurrection of the Flesh (New York: Macmillan, 1922) pp. 1-2.

[18]Gregory of Nyssa, "On the Soul and Resurrection," in Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1956) V, 310.

Development of Funereal Practices

The theological understandings of death were conveyed in the early funereal practices. The Apostolic Constitutions, written probably by 325 A.D., gives the clearest indication of the givens for early Christian funerals. In the sixth book, Section VI, it is noted that: for Christians the dead body is not unclean; even the relics of those who died in Christ are holy; during funerals, Christians should joyously sing psalms, because the souls of the righteous are in the hands of God.[19] Book eight, Section IV, advises Christians to pray for the dead in Christ that God may forgive them of sins and give the dead souls a place into the bosom of Abraham. Memorials for the dead in Christ, to be celebrated with psalms, lessons and prayers, were to be observed on the third, ninth, and fortieth days following death, as well as annually on the anniversaries of the individual Christians' deaths, according to the book. Also, alms for the poor were to be given from the estates of the faithful departed persons. It is noted that feasts in connection with these celebration dates weren't to evolve into pagan-like orgies.[20]

The Early Church. The joyful funereal practices in the Early Church indicate either that death was viewed as a release, or, at any rate, death was not the end. Value for this world, for God's creation, is seen in the attitude towards the corpse, which

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[19]"Apostolic Constitutions," in The Ante-Nicene Fathers, VII, 467.

[20]"Apostolic Constitutions," p. 498.

was not - in contrast to Pharisaic and Sadduccean Judaism - considered to be unclean. The primitive Christians, a cognitive minority like the Qumran community, appear to have had affinities with that community. To be baptized was to die in Christ. Physical death meant dwelling with Christ. Sure of their future, those early Christians could wear white to funerals and sing joyful psalms. Theodicy centered on Christ, God's gift for overcoming the devil, evil, and death.

The Middle Ages. During the early medieval period, the monasteries developed the burial office. The rite was initially incorporated in the regular worship liturgy. However, the monastic orders made the office so ceremoniously complex that the original core of the liturgy was lost.[21] Philipeau notes a radical shift from the Early Church's emphasis on entry into paradise to a gradual terrorizing of death - i.e., emphases on judgment, a change from paschal and baptismal type psalmody to wrathful, judgmental scripture, and a morbid preoccupation with the horrors of death and post-death torments.[22]

The radical shift in the Church's theology on death can be viewed as having resulted from a fluctuation in theodicy during the fourth century. But, the genesis of the reorientation could be traced to Tertullian's writings. Tertullian planted the seeds of

[21]Geoffrey Rowell, The Liturgy of Christian Burial (London: William Clowes and Sons, 1977) p. 64.

[22]Rowell, p. 72.

purgatory and the evil nature of humanity. Augustine, in countering
Pelagian thought, brought Tertullian's seeds to the green-leaf stage.
Augustine transmuted theodicy into the problem of anthropodicy.
Humanity, cheered and jeered by the devil, was viewed by Augustine
(and Paul before him) as being evil to the bones of Adam and Eve.
The only mitigating factor in Augustine's scathing transmutation was
the suffering, saving Jesus Christ who justified, not God in the
face of evil in the world, but the evil of humanity in the courts of God.
Grace and perseverance were, in Augustine's understanding, granted to
some persons. With perseverance, the almost "good" were ensured of
making it into the "City of God" -- with faith and rigorous efforts.

Augustinian theology shifted theodicy basically from a
dualistic theodicy, as it was expressed in the Early Church, to
an other-worldly theodicy, which caused humanity to focus on the
malignant possibilities of afterlife. Augustine's theology was
so counter-Pelagian that it developed into a Pelagian phobia, with
persons desperately trying to earn their way into heaven. The in-
dictment against humanity was propelled through the middle ages
until purgatory, itself, became a balm in Gilead. The Church,
rather than theologizing the meanings of life and death, moralized
both from the fifth through the sixteenth centuries.

The Reformation. The Protestant Reformation broke the hold
of indulgences and purgatory. With its focus on scripture, the
prospects of death and afterlife became more optimistic. However,
within the Calvinistic strands of the Reform, predestination,

moralizing, and a contempt for death continued. Calvin, himself, defended the burial office.[23] However, the trend in Calvinism was to bury the dead as a necessary civil act, without any religious connotations or respect for the body of the deceased person.[24] Luther's and Cranmer's burial practices appear to have focused more on the burial customs of the Early Church, and they reflect a dualistic theodicy. The Calvinistic theology led to a dualistic theodicy, but the this-worldly rewards came to be strongly emphasized, because of the uncertainty about election.

Berger notes that the Protestant Reformation, in its attempts to debunk the magic and corruptible practices within the Church, tended to produce a "disenchantment with the world" - i.e., shrinking the sacred world which provided meaning(s) for life and death.[25] The scope of the sacred, the transcendent, and the miraculous was so debunked that God was assigned a place in the heavens, while earthly scholarship set about confining and defining the holy rationalistically.

The Post-Reformation Period. Twelve centuries of the wrathful, judgmental God ran in the veins of the Church, and it couldn't

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[23]John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) II, 1001-1002.

[24]Harry Barrow, "A Briefe Discourse of the False Church," in Horton Davies (Ed.) Worship and Theology in England (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970) I, 333-334.

[25]Berger, The Sacred Canopy, p. 111.

be flushed-out in a few hundred years - not even by scholarship.
The wrathful God reappeared in the Puritan New England communities
during the sixteenth century. Periodic reforms, arising from the
"Great Awakenings," sought to reconcile theodicy and anthropodicy, to
focus on the love of God and God's presence and mercy. Though romanticism
glorified death and reduced the image of the wrathful God, there has re-
mained within the Church to our present time the notion of God being the
bookkeeper of morals.

THE COLLAPSE OF THE CANOPY

Centuries ago the Church provided the canopy of meaning for
society and its institutions. The rise of humanism and secularization
resulted in the widespread collapse of the plausibility of traditional
religion.[26] Secularization is the removing of meaning from under the
sacred canopy. Whereas people worked as a part of a vocation in the
nineteenth century, twentieth century people work for their own fi-
ducial gain or for the good of society. Marriage which was once
sanctified by the Church, because it was the will of God, became op-
tional or for the good of society or the individuals' needs. With
the significance of life factors (i.e., jobs, marriages) removed from
under the sacred canopy, the sacred canopy collapsed, no longer pro-
viding meaning for everyday life.

Sacredness was then conferred on jobs, the quality of life
or life-style, desired immortality, or on institutions, such as ed-

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[26]Berger, The Sacred Canopy, p. 127, Chapter 6.

ucation and technology. They became ends, not means. (This reflects

the thesis set forth by Jim A. Sanders that sin is desiring creation,

rather than the Creator.[27]) Berger traces the roots of secularization

to Christian scholars who sought to study the glory of God in nature.

This led to the development of science with its own rationality. And

this evolved into humanism. Both provided their own meaning systems,

paving the way for technology. Bureaucracies developed to accomo-

date the technological society.[28] Separation of Church and State was

inevitable, because the State no longer needed validation by the

Church. The bureaucracy validated the State.

Religion could no longer be imposed by the State. The

sacred canopy of meaning moved from providing meaning for society

to providing meaning to individual believers within society. Char-

acteristically, the Church reflected the culture in which it lived,

and churches followed the trend to become bureaucratic entities.

Crisis of Protestant Theology

Berger sees: "the theologian more and more resembles a

witch doctor stranded among local positivists - or, of course, a

logical positivist stranded among witch doctors."[29] Modern, this-

worldly Protestantism, he charges, has been in a state of crisis

since Schleirmacher (1799). Liberal theology sought to provide a

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[27]Sanders, pp. 52, 62.

[28]Berger, The Sacred Canopy, pp. 132, 139-141, 148.

[29]Berger, Rumor of Angels, p. 8.

cognitive adjustment for Christianity with the world view of modernity, at the expense of shucking the supernatural underpinings of the Christian tradition.[30] The Church's apologetic, conveyed via theologians, became "scientific."

Modern Theologies

The "Lifes of Jesus" scholasticism questioned the resurrection. While this weakened the moral worm that gnawed at the evangel, it also denigrated the evangel. The social gospel evolved. It was humanity carrying out God's work of eradicating evil. Maurice, Temple, Rauschenbusch and many of the social reformers sought to initiate God's justice within the world, and were moored in the gospel. Their goal was to mediate the Kingdom of God on earth through humanistic efforts. World War I was an evil humanity couldn't overcome. Neo-orthodoxy was an attempt to get back to roots, to theologize and not moralize; it was an attempt to regrasp a theodicy. But, World War II led many scholars to suggest that the God they were trying to theologize about just wasn't God, or else that God was dead.

Whereas the historical Jesus studies seriously questioned the notion of resurrection, more recent scholarship has sought to reject the doctrine of immortality of the soul, while setting forth a doctrine of a future, corporate resurrection. Schwarz notes that: "most leading figures in contemporary Protestant theology reject the idea

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[30]Berger, Rumor of Angels, pp. 10-12, 51-52.

of immortality."[31] Gatch asserts: "On the whole, it can be said of

biblical writings that they have no theology of death or an after-

life."[32] Both Cullmann and Pelikan deny that there was a doctrine

of immortality of the soul in primitive Christianity.[33]

Theological Novelties

The theological novelties since the 1950's could be con-

sidered a continued liberal advancement to free Christianity from

its supernatural moorings in order to accomodate modern society. Berger

terms these post-1950 theologies "mood theologies," which have in

herently within them the self-liquidation of the theological enter-

prise.[34] Since Berger's writing in 1970, new mood theologies have

evolved: the laughing, crying, and fighting-mad variety in the genre

of liberation theology, and, the "me-ism" of the philosphical pro-

cess thought, both of which center - often - more on individuals than

on God. Some of the liberation genre confuse Jesus with Judas the

Zealot in the telling of the story.

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[31]Hans Schwarz, On the Way to the Future (Minneapolis: Augs-
burg, 1972) p. 176.

[32]Milton McC. Gatch, Death (New York: Seabury Press, 1961)
p. 35.

[33]Oscar Cullmann, Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of
the Dead? (London: Epworth Press, 1958); Jaroslav Pelikan, The
Shape of Death (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1961) Chapter 2.

[34]Berger, Rumor of Angels, pp. 10-12, 52.

As theological novelties evolved, society developed a fourth type of theodicy, a type Berger doesn't address, but it is relevant to a sociological analysis of the theological enterprise. This theodicy, "the Great Society Syndrome," is a variation of the this-worldly theodicy which is both a vindication and an abortion of any Augustinian notion of anthropodicy. Rooted in the Enlightenment and in deism's heyday, this syndrome reflects the Greek polis theodicy in its inclination for "Manifest Destiny." Human nature became elevated, and the human intellect glorified. It perceived that humanity, through its know-how, could conquer all evils, even the evil of death. This theodicy gave humans, not God, control over life and death, extending life technologically and assuming that the scientific professionals and government officials could be responsible for bioethical decisions, drug legislation, and "hazardous to your health" edicts for all society. This came to be reflected even in the justice system which empathized with the good nature to be tapped within criminals.

Positively, this theodicy appears to have stimulated within the Church a new sense of servanthood. This sense of servanthood is often apparent in the intentions of some of the liberation genre theologies. Often, servanthood can focus on a cause, not theologizing in seeking its impetus to serve; then it's secular. Wrenched from any religious attachments, the Great Society Syndrome lacks theologizing and biblically moralizing roots. General confusion arises concerning what theology is; morals are left to individual interpretations; death lacks meaning, requiring a phobic denial or techno-

logical manipulations to conquer physical demise.

CHALLENGE TO THEOLOGIANS

Berger's treatise challenging contemporary theologians to develop an anthropologically-significant theology is contained in A Rumor of Angels. Even before Berger launches into his treatise, he breathes a poignant, pregnant summons in the preface of his work. With wit and wisdom he disclaims the essay as a sociological study. He says that the book is written for anyone: "with a concern about religious questions and the willingness to think about them theologically."[35] Berger writes as one concerned, noting that, as a human, as a Christian, he is more than just his professional role. Sociologist is his profession. He's more than just his profession. His identity, as a Christian, is grounded in the story.

Relevant Meanings in Life and Death

The power or efficacy of religion is to be judged, according to Berger, in the way it effectively prepares persons to stand before death, the ultimate anomic experience.[36] No matter how oppressive a society may be, if a person has an altered consciousness (i.e., faith), which allows death to make sense, then the person can live life fully each and every day. The faith process develops as a person becomes part of the community of faith through hearing, owning, living, and

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[35]Berger, Rumor of Angels, p. x

[36]Berger, The Sacred Canopy, p. 51.

telling the story; this is a fundamental dialectic of faith.

The belief that God is "in charge" makes the world make sense. God is the goal, the center of life; materialistic and rationalistic aspects of life are means, not an end or a goal. In Christian faith Christ not only suffered to remove guilt and provide a means for salvation from the world, but Christ knows the hardships and struggles of each believer. It is this Christ who somehow stands at the threshold of death to make death okay. It is this same Christ who sets persons free within the world. Guided by the Holy Spirit, Christians, in their everyday, marketplace lives, can live life boldly, not as religious fanatics, but as whole persons whose citizenship is in heaven.

Owning and Telling the Story

During the 1971 tenth anniversary meeting of the Consultation on Church Union, Peter Berger reminded the churches that they have something to say, that the reason for their existence is the Christian story. Berger was resounding his assertion that traditional religious beliefs are empty of meaning both in the general population and among persons who continue to attend and join churches.[37] In a lecture delivered in 1974, Berger stated: "I am a Christian, which means that I have a stake in the churches' overcoming their 'failure of nerve' and regaining their authority in representing a message that I consider to be of ultimate importance for mankind."[38] It is via the fundamental

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[37]Jim A. Sanders, God Has A Story Too (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) p. 1.

[38]Sanders, God Has A Story Too, Note No. 1, p. 26.

dialectic of faith that persons hear the story, that symbols evolve, sym-
bols that give meaning to everyday life in the midst of inflation, pol-
itics, births, baptisms, marriages, and death. To own the story is to
tell the story.

AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL THEOLOGY

In spite of Protestantism's struggling identity crisis, the
last laugh is on Feurerbach! Feurerbach reduced theology to a narrowed
anthropology by noting that religion is merely humankind's projections.
Berger challenges theologians to develop an anthropological theology,
but appears to do so by expanding on Feurerbach's notion of human-projected
religion and transcedentalizing Pareto's theory.

There are "signals of transcendence" (rumors), the everyday
aspects within an empirically given situation which appear to point be-
yond reality as we know it, the point of contact between God and the
human situation. The projections of mathematics out of human conscious-
ness somehow corresponds to the external mathematical reality - i.e.,
there is a fundamental affinity that appears to occur between the
structures of consciousness and structures within the empirical world.
That same affinity exists in the religious world. Berger asserts that:
"If the religious projections of man correspond to a reality that is
superhuman and supernatural, then it seems logical to look for traces
of this reality in the projector himself."[39] This is the "imago dei"
elevated to an empirical pedestal. It is, in Jim A. Sanders' terminol-

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[39]Berger, Rumor of Angels, p. 47.

ogy, God pointing to facts. And it's humanity attempting to respond
to those facts; the frail attempts of humanity trying to transcedenta-
lize reality.

Five Gestures

Berger cites five "prototypical human gestures" which serve as
examples of signals of transcendence. These gestures are certain re-
iterated acts and experiences, the rituals in the everyday realm of
life.[40] These gestures can be viewed as transcedental reassurance, the
supernatural positing itself in everyday, profane reality. Berger terms
the gestures "arguments," arguments against the Feurerbachs, mood theo-
logians, and those who would denigrate the effect of the supernatural
in today's world. The arguments are a battlecry for theologians to
rediscover the supernatural.

The Argument from Ordering. Religion is not only a projection
of the human order, but the ultimate vindication of the human propensity
for ordering. The bureaucratic tendencies of humanity are no more than
an attempt to imitate the orderliness of God who created and orders
the whole universe. God's sense of orderliness elicits a sense of trust
within humans that everything will be okay. Berger notes that some-
where tonight a child will awaken with a nightmare. Whether the
mother who goes to that child is African, Indian, or American, the
mother's reassurance will probably be the same: "Everything is okay."
Is everything okay? Either the mother is lying, or she is appealing

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[40]Berger, Rumor of Angels, p. 53.

to another reality, a cosmic reality that says, "Have trust." This

reassurance isn't an ethical or social invention. It's universal,

transcending culture. It's ultimate, and science can't speak in ulti-

mates.[41]

The Argument from Play. This transcendental signal elucidates

another experience common to all persons. Play disrupts the ordinary

sense of time. The universe becomes a timeless eternity, as play sus-

pends time. Because of this suspension, rules are required in order

to limit and structure play. Joy is play's intension. The argument

from joyful play isn't on a mystical margin of existence; it happens

in reality. It reflects a child-like state of perceived deathlessness.[42]

The Argument from Hope. This argument is reflected in the pro-

pensity for human existence to always be oriented toward the future.

A key ingredient in all theodicies is hope: man's "no" to death.[43] Re-

ality is reinterpreted as persons become outraged at the prospects of

death of a loved one or self. Yet, there is, intrinsic to persons, the

hope for an extended life beyond this reality. There is faith in some-

thing more than death. Religion vindicates the gestures in which hope

is activated; this is seen especially in death-defying acts of courage

or self-sacrifice where an individual risks his/her life without

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[41]Berger, Rumor of Angels, p. 55.

[42]Berger, Rumor of Angels, p. 58.

[43]Berger, Rumor of Angels, pp. 61, 64.

thought in order to defend or save an innocent victim.[44]

The Argument from Damnation. Societal legal systems are human attempts to mimic God's justice. But, this argument reflects human acts so terrible that, if the courts were to give due punishments, the prosecutors would be so dehumanized that they would be leveled to the same inhuman status as the criminals. God has to provide ultimate judgment and punishment for these "God-awful" crimes. Humanity is numbed, yet outraged, at the brutality of certain crimes, which are so terrible that the crimes, themselves, cry out to heaven for judgment, because they violate basic humanness - e.g., the crimes of Adolf Eichmann or the "Freeway Killer."[45]

The Argument from Humor. This gesture can have two, simultaneous meanings. In the midst of the tragedy of life, humor emerges. Berger views the comic aspect of life as reflecting the imprisonment of the human spirit in the present world. Laughing at the human condition, at this imprisonment of the spirit, points to redemption, the the overcoming of biologically-imposed human limitations. Humor is an escape vent pointing to transcendence. Humor can also serve to mock the dire seriousness of the business within the world, the demand for order.[46] What Berger is essentially saying is that when life hurts too much to cry, the gift of humor allows for laughter, for comic relief, which points to a significance beyond life as it is ordinarily perceived.

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[44]Berger, Rumor of Angels, p. 64.

[45]Berger, Rumor of Angels, pp. 65-66.

[46]Berger, Rumor of Angels, p. 70.

Seeking Transcedental Truths in the Empirical World

Berger seeks to juxtapose the supernatural with the natural, to develop an inductive faith. The historical dimension within all human experiences contains theologically relevant data. It's God and humanity making contact in the enterprise of personal history, community history, and world history. History, with traditions, contains other transcedental signals, waiting for metaphysical evaluation - i.e., discovering what humanity at a certain period in time perceived as transcendent truth. Berger's suggested method for doing theology could facilitate examining scripture and traditions, not in order to moralize, but to seek an understanding of the richness of the human experiences of the transcendent, of God trying to speak to humanity, and of humanity's anemic attempts to respond to God.

SUMMARY

In summary, this compendium of Berger's works has several hefty messages for the Church: (1) the Church is called to provide meaning for human experiences within life and death; (2) the reality set forth by the Church is deviant to that reality prevalent within culture; (3) both the contemporary Church and modes of theological thought have accomodated society; (4) God is alive and speaks to persons in everyday situations; and, (5) the pluralism within society calls for a radical, inductive theology that juxtaposes the supernatural with the natural, with the natural being an attempt to imitate the supernatural.

Sam Keen catches the flavor of what Berger is saying when Keen states that seminaries should use the model of the shaman, rather than the priestly model, in training persons today. The shaman speaks out of experience, rather than gossiping about others' experience. The shaman, unafraid of religious ecstasy is bold in addressing "divine madness." Shamans know the depth of human experiences.[47]

Ecstasy and metaphysics are crucial dimensions of life, and can be integrated into empirical learning. They are part of the story, the Judaeo-Christian story, which has instilled identity, meaning and purpose into the life and death of individuals and communities for thousands of years. This story conveys the life experiences of people and their perceptions of life-changing transcendental gestures.

Utilizing Berger's insights, a contemporary theology of death should integrate reason and revelation with human experiences. It should elicit within people a recognition of transcendental signals in individuals' personal existence within the world.

MOVING ON: A FOREWORD

Understanding how the faith process functions (i.e., the dialectic), provides a basis for understanding how a theology of death could function within a death-phobic society, providing meanings for life and death, meanings grounded in Early Church doctrines and the Christian story. It is now necessary to develop a criterion for an anthropologically significant theology of death.

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[47]Jim Fowler and Sam Keen, Life Maps (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1978) pp. 155-156.

Chapter 4

A VIABLE THEOLOGY FOR DYING

"Every attempt," according to Helmut Thielicke, "to get at the meaning of life must inevitably face the question of death. It is necessarily so, if for no other reason than that death appears in every life."[1] Death is a universal, all comprehensive phenomenon which eclipses the human ambitions for meaningful employment, self-esteem, community status, accumulation of wealth, leisure and the rich, full life. Science can explain the biological phenomenon of death; philosophy can seek to interpret the existential meanings within human life; but, theology must offer to humanity the meanings of life and death. Theology is called to make death make sense in today's world.

A THEOLOGY FOR DYING AND LIVING

With the exception of Helmut Thielicke, contemporary Protestant theologians have shown little interest in thanatology. The most recently published treatise on the theology of death is written by Karl Rahner, the Roman Catholic theologian.[2] Rahner's book, On the Theology of Death, is exemplary of a confusion which exists in thanatology, the confusion between dying, the dying process and the cessation of biological function which is physical death.

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[1]Helmut Thielicke, Life and Death (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970) p. 7. (Original draft of the book written during post-war years.)

[2]Karl Rahner, On the Theology of Death (New York: Herder & Herder, 1961).

The contemporary term "death with dignity" is in itself a
misnomer. It should be "dying with dignity." Each of us begins to
die at the moment of birth. The dying process continues until vital
parts of the physical being become non-functional and physical, or bio-
logical, death occurs. What is needed is not a theology of death, but
rather, a theology of dying. Or, to be more precise, a theology for
dying, a theology for living and dying. . . .

Criterion

This theology for living and dying needs to reflect the Chris-
tian story, and, as noted at the end of the chapter three, should inte-
grate reason, revelation and the experiences which herald transcendental
signals. A further requisite for formulating a theology for dying
is that the theology must reconcile or neutralize the problems in-
herent within theodicy and anthropodicy. Central to the criterion
should be the four United Methodist guidelines for theologizing: (1)
scripture; (2) Christian tradition; (3) experience; and, (4) reason.
Within the four United Methodist guidelines for theologizing, scripture
is given primacy; it is considered to be God's self-revelation, and
it contains all that is necessary for salvation. Tradition repre-
sents the Church's historical interpretations of the revelation put
into practice. Experience refers to the appropriation of the revela-
tion in faith, whereby faith understandings effect the total life
of individuals both in the world and within the community of faith.
Revelation and experience are not limited by reason; faithful rev-
elation and experience can transcend reason. However, scientific

criticism is viewed as a tool to elucidate the Word of God which is
present within the scripture, calling to humanity, revealing God's
hopes for all humanity, as recorded in the Bible. Scripture, tradit-
ion, experience, and reason interact together, to facilitate a clarity
in understanding God's call to humanity; to provide consistency and
stability to the understandings of faith as an intellectual, revela-
tional, and practical living process.[3]

The Apologetic

The argument I want to set forth is a paradigm which negates
the power of death, and demonstrates that immortality and resurrection
are synthesized in the canons of the Old and New Testaments, as well as
in the rabbinical writings. The purpose of this chapter is to develop
an apologetic for the paradigm within the context of the criterion. This
chapter addresses the following: Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) writings;
Old Testament and rabbinical thoughts; New Testament understandings of
death; the theological paradigm for negating the power of death in
appropriation of the gospel message; the neutralization of theodicy
and anthropodicy via the gospel; and, the transcendental signals or
"gestures" which validate immortality and resurrection.

If death is considered the goal for all existence, a term-
inating point, then death presses individuals to either ignore, hold
contempt for, or battle against that totally obliterating point of

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[3]Book of Discipline (Nashville: United Methodist Publishing
House, 1976) Paragraph 69, pp. 77-80.

personal demise. The gospel of Jesus Christ negates the paradigm

of death as an obliterating totality. The gospel speaks about death

and the meanings of life directed towards death. The New Testament

message of eternal life did not appear in isolation. The gospel

message of life directed towards death is the gift culminating Is-

rael's search for eschatological understanding. Living and dying

are given meaning in the revelation of God through Jesus the Christ.

Methodology and Terms

For the sake of expediency and not out of a disregard for the

theological layers (redactions) and chronological dating of the Old

Testament canon, I'm following Brevard Childs' notion that the final

shape of the canon is authoritative, representing traditions incorpo-

rated and legitimated during the lengthy process of canonization.[4]

Jim A. Sanders' concept of sin as confusing the Creator and the created

is intrinsic to the apologetic.[5] And, I'm relying on Paul Tillich's

definition of forgiveness: "Forgetting in spite of remembering is

forgiveness. We can live only because our guilt is forgiven and, thus,

eternally forgotten."[6]

A blitzkrieg through the canon is meant to provide a "standard,"

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[4]Brevard Childs, Biblical Theology in Crisis (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970) Part 2.

[5]Jim A. Sanders, The Old Testament in the Cross (New York: Harper & Row, 1961) p. 52.

[6]Paul Tillich, The Eternal Now (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963) p. 32.

as well as representing a synthesis of reason, tradition, and revelation (or Holy Spirit guidance). The rabbinical traditions should provide the experiential, the fourth of the United Methodist guidelines for theologizing. The rabbinical writings represent how faith was experienced and rationalized in the Jewish community as it was confronted by death.

The ANE writings are addressed because of their possible influence on the Old Testament canon. The concept of immortality or after-life is intrinsic in the literature of the Sumerians and Assyro-Babylonians. This concept within the ANE literature is dependent upon the creation epics told and shared within those cultures. Lambert has traced the Babylonian creation story to 1600 B.C., and the myth was probably cojoined to the Babylonian New Year's festival by 750 B.C.[7] Whybray notes that the epic "enuma Elish" was the "in" myth during the 500's B.C., an attractive myth for the Jews in exile in Babylon.[8]

The argument I'm making is that, as the "P" editors put their finishing touches on the Torah, their zeal to monotheize effected the final copy of Genesis, chapters one through three. Regardless of how the Genesis text looked prior to the handicraft of the priestly redactors, the final copy shows a stark contrast to the "Enuma Elish" account of creation.

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[7]W. G. Lambert, "Myth and Ritual as Conceived by the Babylonians," Journal of Semitic Studies XL (1968) 104-112.

[8]R. H. Whybray, The Heavenly Counsellor in Isaiah 40:13-14 (Cambridge: University Press, 1971) pp. 39-41.

ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN WRITINGS

The "Enuma Elish" concerns the god Marduk who was known during the intertestamental period as Bel, the living god of Babylon, the creator god par excellence. Marduk won his fame by conquering Tiamat, the god of chaos. When Marduk defeated Tiamat, bringing order out of chaos, the other gods conferred power to Marduk in return for his protection. The more important gods assumed positions on the Heavenly Council under Marduk's kingship.[9] The lesser gods were assigned the task of building a city for Marduk. These lesser gods complained about the task, so Marduk assigned his father Ea to lead a task force to produce humans to build the city. A minor god who was at odds with Marduk was slain, and his blood was mixed with clay to form humans:

Arteries I will knot and bring bones into being.
I will create Lullu, 'man' be his name,
I will form 'Lullu,' man.
Let him be burdened with the toil of the gods,
that they may freely breathe.

They bound him, held him before Ea,
inflicted the penalty on him severed his arteries;
and from his blood he formed mankind,
imposed toil on man, set the gods free.[10]

The humans were designed to be mortal. Any notions of a type of immortality could be traced to the blood of the minor god which gave life to Ea's productions. Bailey notes that the "etemmu" or ghostly figures were considered a threat to the living. Funeral cults, like those in later Rome, arose to placate the dead with food and drink

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[9]Whybray, p. 25.

[10]Thornkild Jacobsen, The Treasures of Darkness (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976) pp. 180-181.

offerings.[11] Disease and death were attributed to gods, the demons, or the ghosts that roamed the land. It is significant, though, that it was perceived that life came from a divine or semi-divine source.[12]

The Mesopotamian "Atrahasis Epic" has a similar creation story of the genesis of humanity, involving the warrior god Enlil (comparable to Marduk) and Nintur, the birth goddess.[13] In the "Gilgamesh Epic" the king of Uruk seeks to overcome mortality. Following a series of adventures, the hero-king accepts his inevitable fate. The "Gilgamesh Epic" also relates the death-world experience of the king's friend Enkidu who described the ghosts in the world of the deceased.[14]

CAUSES OF DEATH IN THE OLD TESTAMENT AND RABBINICAL WRITINGS

The canonized creation account states that God created the earth from nothingness, not from chaos. There is a repudiation by the Jews of the polytheistic myths of creation and the genesis of humanity. Humanity was formed not as slave labor for the gods; rather, humans were made in God's image for fellowship with God.

Within the Genesis etiologies there are two strands of thought: (1) in the first chapter God created a mortal humanity; and, (2) the

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[11]Lloyd R. Bailey, Sr., Biblical Perspectives on Death (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979) pp. 9-10.

[12]Bailey, pp. 8-11.

[13]Tekva Fryner-Kensky, "The Atrahasis Epic and Its Significance for Our Understanding of Genesis 1-9," Biblical Archaeologist XL (1977) 147-155.

[14]Jacobsen, Chapter 7.

"J" strand in chapters two and three depicts Adam and Eve as having been created immortal, but made mortal by sin - i.e., disobedience and desiring to be like God. The snake of the "Gilgamesh Epic" has a role in the Adam and Eve narrative. But, inasmuch as the snake ate the rejuvenating plant Gilgamesh sought, in the Genesis, chapter three account, the snake is the tempter, goading Eve to eat from a "magical" tree, which resulted in fixed mortality. God was the source of good and evil - i.e., evil as human toil or the pain in childbearing. Yet, the snake appears as a tempter within God's domain of good and evil.

The earlier rabbinical material, dating to the tannaitic period, viewed death as inevitable, saying that the angel of death was created during the first day of creation.[15] The "Misnas" (Avot 4:22) maintain that death was regarded as inevitable; sin could hasten death, but it wasn't the source of death.[16] Later writings note that Adam's sin was the source of death; but, then, God offered the Torah as a means for overcoming death. When the Hebrews worshipped the golden calf, the efficacy of the Torah to overcome death was diminished in punishment for the Hebrews' idolatry.[17]

In the intertestamental Wisdom of Solomon, there was a radical shift: death was attributed to sin and the devil (1:13). "God created man for immortality. . . it was the devil's spite that brought death into

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[15]Rudolph Kayser, "Death" in Encyclopaedia Judaica (New York: Macmillan, 1941) V, 1424.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Ibid.

the world" (2:23-24 NEB). Hayman, however, notes that the monotheizing

rabbinical literature attributed God with both "hesed" and "yetzer ha-ra";

humans made in God's image, have both the merciful and the wrathful

(i.e., indicating justice) natures of God. There was no need for dis-

cussion concerning Adam and the Fall in the rabbinical literature, be-

cause the problem of evil and humanity's inability to follow the Torah

was pushed back onto God. Justice was the inexorable principle of retri-

bution operating in the world, and God worked to balance that retribution.

Prayers gave an "edge" to God's merciful nature. Later, justice became

personified, appearing as Satan in apocalyptic Judaism. Hayman notes

that in the rabbinical literature there is no clear theology of Satan.[18]

In the Torah and later writings death is attributed to withdrawal

of the life force ("nephesh") or breath ("ruah"). This is seen in Gen.

2:7; 6:3; 35:18; and, Deut. 32:29. There is evidence that the Jews

considered the deceased to continue in some type of subexistence, though

the word "soul" isn't used (1 Sam. 28), and there are numerous prohibi-

tions against necromancy (or the cult of the dead), as practiced by

Israel's neighbors (Lev. 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:9, 11). Whereas food and

libation were offered to spirits of the deceased in societies with a

cult of the dead, the Jews were to give grain and wine offerings to

only the living God, the one who controls life and death (Deut. 32:17;

26:14; 28:22; 32:39). There are evidences, such as 1 Sam.:28, that there

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[18]A. P. Hayman, "Rabbinic Judaism and the Problem of Evil,"
Scottish Journal of Theology IXXX:5 (1974) 461-476.

was a cult of the dead that continued within the Hebraic-Jewish tradi-
tions until the period of the Second Temple (Tob. 4:7; Ecclus. 30:18).

Afterlife in Old Testament, Jewish Thought

The notion of the dead returning to dust is countered by the
concept of Sheol or the region of the dead (Num. 16:33; 1 Sam. 28:13;
Psa. 6; Isa. 14:9-12; Ezek. 32:17-32). Sheol is the pit, "the nether
part of the earth" (Ezek. 31:14 RSV), "the land of darkness (Job 10:21
RSV). Though God controlled Sheol, there was no contact between God and
the deceased in Sheol (Psa. 30:10; 88:6, 12-13). Enoch and Elijah escaped
Sheol. The point I want to make is that the two etiologies in Genesis
are, generally, carried through the canon in the forms of man returning
to dust or continuing in some ethereal, post-death state, with the ex-
ceptions of Enoch, Elijah, and possibly Moses. The two etiologies ex-
isted side by side, later merging and evolving into the doctrines of im-
mortality and resurrection.

Rabbinical Writings on Afterlife

The rabbis noted that all humanity is subject to mortality. Where-
as the wicked die so they will no longer anger God, the righteous die to
claim rest from evil inclination that has power over them during the
earthly life, but not in death. The wicked were considered dead even during
their earthly lifetimes, and the righteous were considered as living even
in death. That is, the quality of life on earth is carried into the
hereafter.[19]

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[19]Encyclopaedica Judaica V, 1423.

It was said by the rabbis that the soul leaves the body at death with a cry which reverberates throughout the world. But, the soul passes into another state of existence.[20] There are several strands of thought in the rabbinical, talmudic and midrashic literature concerning the fate of the soul following death. The raising of the prophet Samuel (1 Sam. 28) is attributed to the idea that the soul of the deceased lingers near the body for about a year or until the physical body had disintegrated. For the wicked the year was a purgatorial period, but the righteous went to paradise after spending a year in a blissful sort of a nether state.[21] Other rabbinical thoughts maintained that the soul either went to Sheol, an intermediate state of subexistence, to await judgment, or the soul was judged immediately following death.[22]

How a person died and the day on which death occurred were considered by the rabbis to be significant.[23] Persons approaching death were encouraged to confess their sins. Significant to Christianity is the following confession formula, which was also used by the priests in the rite of the Day of Atonement:

> I acknowledge unto Thee, O Lord my God, and God of my fathers, that both my cure and my death are in Thy hands. May it be Thy will to send me a perfect healing. Yet if my death be fully determined by Thee, I will in love accept it at Thy hand. O may my death be an atonement for all my sins, iniquities, and transgression of which

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[20]Ibid.

[21]Cecil Roth, et al., "Afterlife" in Encyclopaedia Judaica II, 337.

[22]Gershon Shaked, "Soul" in Encyclopaedia Judaica XV, 176.

[23]Encyclopaedia Judaica II, 337.

I have been guilty against Thee (Sh. Ar., YD 338:2).[24]

It is noted that following the destruction of the Temple (587 B.C.), the atoning value of death was greatly magnified. Complete forgiveness was dependent on the final atoning value of a person's death. This atoning value could be for either the individual or for the individual and the corporate community of believers.[25] In IV Maccabees there is heavenly immortality for martyrs; II Maccabees addresses the resurrection of the righteous. It was, of course, during this intertestamental period that the concept of "messiah" arose. Interestingly, biblical scholarship has not rejected the concept of the "messiah," in spite of its late arrival on the scene. Yet, one of the reasons for questioning resurrection and doubting immortality is the late dating of the concepts in the canon.

While acknowledging that Daniel (Dan. 12:22) gives the first explicit biblical formulation of the resurrection of the dead, the Encyclopaedia Judaica states:

> The components of the idea of resurrection were present in biblical thought from early times. That God can revive the dead is one of His praises: 'I slay and revive; I wounded and I will heal' (Deut. 32:39; cf. Pes. 68a for the argument that death and life of the same person is meant); 'YHWH slays and revives; He brings down to Sheol and raises up' (I Sam. 2:6; cf. II Kings 5:7). His power to do so was exhibited through the acts of Elijah and Elisha (I Kings 17:17ff; II Kings 4:18ff).[26]

The rabbis rejected the Greek doctrine of immortality of the

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[24]Encyclopaedia Judaica V, 1425.

[25]Encyclopaedia Judaica V, 1423.

[26]Daniel Boyarin and Seymour Siegel, "Resurrection" in Encyclopaedia Judaica XIV, 97.

soul - i.e., as set forth by Philo (and later Origen) with the idea of the immortal soul being released from its bodily prison house at death to return to God. The rabbis discerned that neither the body nor soul can be judged alone, but must be punished or rewarded in whole. The notion of the physical resurrection was corporeal.[27] There was, as previously noted, no agreement in the rabbinical school regarding whether the soul went to Sheol to await judgment and resurrection, or if the soul received immediate judgment prior to the actual resurrection.

As pointed out by Jim A. Sanders in his paradigm of "Prophetic Literature in the Covenant Lawsuit tradition," the notion of salvation through judgement and transformation, or rebirth, through death, existed in pre-exilic prophetic books.[28] The cry for reformation within the classical prophetic literature evolved into an edict of transformation. From the ashes of 587 B.C. and the Hebraic exile, there arose, there was born, the Jewish people.[29] The prophet of the New Covenant, Jeremiah, definitively answers the question of original sin (Jer. 31:29-31). Perhaps Sanders has hit on the theme set forth in the monotheizing revelations within both the Old Testament and New Testament canons: That Yahweh is the God of transformation.

AFTERLIFE IN NEW TESTAMENT THOUGHT

The notions of transformation or rebirth through death and sal-

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[27]Encyclopaedia Judaica XIV, 99.

[28]Jim A. Sanders, Torah and Canon (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1972) pp. 75-84.

[29]Sanders, Torah and Canon, p. 83.

vation by judgment are juxtaposed to the concept of the messiah and the New Covenant. The Incarnation and the Cross are the answer to the problem of anthropodicy. But, resurrection is the answer to the problem of theodicy; specifically, the resurrection of the incarnational Jesus the Christ is God's promise to those who believe (Acts 26:23; 1 Col. 6:14). God who believes in humanity negates anthropodicy by providing the atonement of Calvary. Humanity which believes in God and the efficacy of Calvary and the promise of Jesus' resurrection negates a monotheistic theodicy. The atoning death of Jesus overcomes the evil in either the nature of humanity, or in the nature of the world. God is justified through Christ. Humanity is justified through Christ: "For God so loved the world. . ."

Perhaps death is feared, because in facing death, persons are forced to realize God is Creator, not humans, in spite of contemporary technological chauvanism which views humanity as creator. Sanders notes that faith isn't confidence; it's a commitment, a radical perception that God, alone, is Creator and concerned about that which was/is created. "Philosophers," according to Sanders, "are those persons who speak of God as being humanity's ultimate concern; the Bible speaks of humanity as being God's ultimate concern."[30]

If Satan is the prototype of the persons who confused Creator and created, then John 8:44 becomes clearer. At any rate, within the dominant strands of biblical thought, Satan is viewed as being either a member of the Heavenly Council or a fallen angel whose only clout is

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[30]Sanders, The Old Testament and the Cross, p. 54.

in his ability to tempt or "snitch" on the righteous (Job 1; Psa.
109:6; Zec. 3:2; Mk. 1:13; Luke 4:8; 1 Cor. 7:5; Rev. 2:30). But, in
monotheistic theology, Satan does not have the final say on life, death
or afterlife.

Within the Johannine theology, to overcome the world is to
overcome the lack of meaning and purpose within life and death in the
world, to gain eternal life. To overcome the world is to be liberated
from sin and death, to be free of the created and open to the Creator
(Jn. 3:16; 4:14; 10:27-28; 16:33; 17:15). As noted by Kümmel, "Con-
sequently, the liberation from death and the gift of life are for John
a reality which occurs in the present in the life of the Christians."[31]

Resurrection is a radical transformation, granted by the life
giving activity of God. It is not a Greek or gnostic rejection of the
flesh, for resurrection begins within the flesh, during the earthly life,
as the Christian believer adapts an altered view of reality. Death is
cancelled, but becomes a part of life. In the words of Hans Küng:
"If God is the ultimate reality, then death is not destruction but
metamorphosis - not a diminishing, but a finishing."[32]

THE RELATIONAL THEOLOGY OF JOHN

The Johannine view neither supports secular thoughts on immor-
tality of the soul, nor does it eradicate death. Our salvation, our

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[31]Werner Georg Kümmel, The Theology of the New Testament
(Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973) p. 295.

[32]Hans Küng, On Being A Christian (Garden City, NY: Double-
day, 1976) p. 351.

immortality and eventual resurrection, are relational - i.e., dependent upon our relationship with God through Jesus Christ. Relying on Johannine theology and Luther's thoughts on "alien righteousness," Helmut Thielicke highlights this relational aspect of eternal life and synthesizes the doctrines of immortality and resurrection.

It is not so much a matter of humans being the only creatures who have a consciousawareness of inevitable death as it is that the individual must, in death, total death of the body and soul, stand alone before God. Human death is more than an occurrence in a biological chain of cause and effect. It represents the cessation of both a biological history and a history of personal relationship with God. The boundary between the Creator and the created is seen in relationships. The relationship between God and created individuals becomes critical as each individual approaches the great boundary, the boundary of death which separates the individual from the Creator and shows that individual to have been, indeed, created and not the Creator.[33]

Realized Eschatology

The Bible teaches that the human is a totality of body and soul, a totality not to be divided without pathological consequences. Each person is a unique, irreplaceable whole. Thielicke asserts that death is overcome by the antithesis of death: "zoe" or "eternal life." Biological or "present life," the natural life of humans, is termed

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[33]Helmut Thielicke, Death and Life (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1970) pp. 186-186.

"psuche." Eternal life comes from Jesus the Christ. Christ has zoe. This zoe is a life in personhood, a life granted by God in our history together with God.[34] It is not an infusion or a transfer of a supra-personal substance, giving individuals a semi-divine quality, nor is it an earned righteousness.

Eternal life, or zoe, is that content or quality of life in Jesus the Christ which was not overcome by death. The zoe quality of life overcame death. Eternal life has a present tense character. In fellowship with God through Christ, humans can know zoe during the psuche life span. Eternal life, granted by God to those who stand responsibly within the fellowship of God, knows righteousness through Christ. Eternal life is immortality of historical personhood in re-lationship to God through Christ. God overcomes death, granting to Christians the confidence that fellowship established with God will not be annulled by death.[35] The fellowship between God and persons is symbolized in the perpetual and transcendent concept of the communion of the saints.

Thielicke states: ". . . biological death can no longer be understood in terms of the wrath of God, for the valid wrath of God has now been overcome by God's own condescension."[36] Death becomes impotent. The sting was taken from death by the One who is both the resurrection and the life. "For in the sphere of God's zoe," according to Thielicke,

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[34]Thielicke, pp. 191-192.

[35]Thielicke, pp. 193, 196, 197.

[36]Thielicke, p. 194.

"death now becomes a parable of my dying to the fundamental thrust of my own animosity towards God."[37]

Physical death continues. But, the devil's power over death is overcome. Thielicke notes that this devil exercises power over death only by telling people that after death there is nothing; the goods of this world are to be gods, that which is of ultimate value to persons.[38] Those who stand in fellowship with Christ no longer need to be anxious about death. Death becomes, in Thielicke's terminology, "a biological mask," insignificant for those in fellowship with the risen Lord. Death occurs for Christians as they anticipate the anxieties over death, and resolve that the God of life is their God.[39]

Believers assume the death of Christ as their very own death; the boundary between the Creator and humans, the created, is removed; and, Christians stand in the realm of the power of the Resurrected One, the One who provided atonement. In that realm of power there cannot be domination by death. Physical death remains to be carried out, but Christ makes our death his own and his death our own death - i.e., Christ validates us when we assume that the death of Christ is our own death. Perhaps, this is echoing Barth's notion that the person who doesn't know what death is, doesn't know what resurrection is either.[40] Any

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[37]Thielicke, p. 195.

[38]Thielicke, p. 194.

[39]Thielicke, pp. 194, 214-215.

[40]Karl Barth, Dogmatics in Outline (New York: Harper & Row, 1959) p. 154.

interim state between death and resurrection would be in fellowship with God through Christ.[41] For Thielicke, death, as known to humanity, undergoes a transformation by the grace of God through Christ.

Transformation

The immortal soul is not released from a prison-house body. Rather, the mortal soul, in relation to God through Christ, is transformed. It's a transformation taking place within the psuche life-span, as persons are confronted with the eschatological possibilities of transformation. As noted by Barth, we are not led away, by our Christian hope, from life in the here and now. Personal eschatology is practical; it should effect how we live, as well as how we die.[42] We are free to care about that which is created without elevating the created to the status of Creator. We can praise God, the Creator, who grants us the enjoyment and use, the stewardship of creation. Through Christ we are transformed and enabled by the Holy Spirit to discern between the Creator and the created. God the Sustainer upholds us, sustains us, enables us to accept the challenge of eschatological possibilities, of the transformation in relationship. Küng complements the preceding in noting that the doctrine of resurrection is a doctrine of radical transformation, a radicalizing of faith in God the Creator.[43]

Yahweh is the God of tranformation, of the eschaton, that

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[41]Thielicke, p. 200.

[42]Barth, pp. 154-155.

[43]Küng, pp. 350, 360.

which is new and fragrant with promise: God transformed nothingness

into creation. And, Abraham was transformed into a great nation.

Through a pagan king, the cunning Abraham was made honest and taught

that God, not the imperiling of Sarah, would protect the patriarch

(Gen. 12:10 - 13:1). Sarah who laughed learned God can transform and

bring forth life (Gen. 21:1-7). The scoundrel Jacob was transformed

to become Israel. Gideon, too, knew a temporary transformation, but

didn't realize that transformation was contingent upon maintaining a

relationship with the living God. A shepherd boy became King David.

Hebraic attempts at reformation led to the funeral of the Hebrew nation

and transformation (rebirth) as Judaism. During the period of the

Maccabean revolt and later years, thoughts which had been formulated in

exile evolved into messianism, the nationalistic Day of Yahweh, and the

doctrines of the immortality of personhood (or extended relational history)

and resurrection.

But, the greatest transformation, the pinnacle of eschatolog-

ical thought, occurred through the condescension of God (Mk. 1:9 or

LUke 2:1-20; and, Mk. 15:33-39; Luke 24). At least eleven disciples

were transformed, as was a segment of Judaism. A group of the trans-

formed began to turn the world upside-down (Acts 17:5 JB). And, a man

named Saul was transformed into Paul. Admist the jeers and laughter

of the Athenians and Romans, this Paul preached a transformed view of

reality. He preached the transformation of forgiveness and resurrec-

tion through the efficacy of Jesus the crucified.

In summary: the Spirit of God woos individuals; the transform-

ing God is also the sustaining God who sustains individuals as they

are confronted with the eschatological possibilities of transformation;
Jesus the Christ is the means for the transformation. Anthropodicy and
theodocy are neutralized by the life, death and resurrection of Jesus.

A THEOLOGY FOR LIVING AND DYING

By Thielicke's schema and biblical revelation (ref. Johannine
theology primarily), a Christian theology for dying must also be a
theology for living. Through fellowship with God in Christ, eternal
life begins in the present. All history is transformed; personal history
is transformed (Phil. 3:13, 14). A theology for living and dying af-
firms the God who believes in humanity; that affirmation includes ac-
ceptance of physical death, in the trust that Yahweh is the God of
the living, that the relationship with God through Christ is an eternal
relationship. It is not an avoidance of life in the here and now, an
escape, or a monastic-type masochism. It's following Christ into the
marketplace of life. In Irenaeus' terminology, it's "recapitulation,"
following the pattern of Christ. It's a rendering of oneself unto
physical death, knowing nothing separates a Christian from the love
of God (Rom. 8:39). Baptism signifies dying with Christ and receiving
the Spirit who convicts, commits, woos, guides, and comforts in the
marketplace of life. Wesley states that new birth isn't to be con-
fused with baptism. New birth is the reality of transformation, of
victory over sin. God's justification brings about a change in our
relationship with God, so that guilt is taken away, and "being sinners

we become saints."[44]

According to Bishop Harmon, regeneration, being born anew, is a gift of God through Christ. The Church itself lacks regenerative powers. That power belongs to God. Regeneration is knowing that one has "passed from death into life."[45] In his sermon, "Human Life A Dream," John Wesley asked his hearers to imagine that they were privvy to observe and overhear the passage of a Christian who had just died:

> You have been an inhabitant of earth, forty, perhaps fifty or sixty years. But now God has uttered his voice, 'Awake, thou that sleep-est!' You awake; you arise; you have no more to do with these poor transient shadows. Arise, and shake thyself from the dust! See, all is real here! all is permanent; all eternal! far more stable than the foundations of the earth; yea, than the pillars of that lower heaven. Now that your eyes are open, see how inexpressibly different are all the things that are now round about you! What a difference do you perceive in yourself!. . . .[46]

Wesley's thoughts on death can be best observed through the events leading up to his physical death. Those near to John Wesley report he made requests regarding his funeral, then he asked those present to pray and to praise God. In pain, Wesley, himself, attempted to sing, and reassured those present that "God is with us." He requested that his sermon on the love of God be disseminated; prayed; praised God, and died in peace, knowing the blood of Jesus to be the way to the

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[44]Martin Schmidt, John Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973) II, 31, 35.

[45]Nolan B. Harmon, Understanding the United Methodist Church (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1977) pp. 63-64.

[46]John Wesley, Selections from the Journal (Nashville: Upper Room, 1967) pp. 31-32

holiest.[47]

The God of the psuche life is the God who is with us in death. Yahweh is the God of life, death, transformation. A theology for living and dying is none other than the central proclamation of the Early Church. Before moving on to the transcendental signals within the theological model, it is necessary to address one more item, which reflects the attitude in the Early Church for the dead physical body of saint - i.e., a Christian believer.

The English statesman William Gladstone stated: "Show me the manner in which a nation or a community cares for its dead, and I will measure with mathematical exactness the character of its people, their respect for laws of the land, and their loyalty to high ideals."[48] The human body, dead or alive, is part of God's creation. To treat the body of the deceased as a defilement is to deny the goodness of even the remembrance of bodily life. A greater defilement is to throw the corpse into the ground, as did the Separtists or the early Pilgrims. Neither is the body to be unduly exalted, via sacralization of saints' relics or the splendor of slumber rooms and make-believe parks of peace, nor, is the body to be denigrated to a speedy cremation and scattering of the ashes with no ceremony whatsoever.

The body, given by God, is to be committed back to God, the Cre-

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[47]Betsy Ritchie, "Wesley's Last Hours," in John Wesley, The Heart of Wesley's Journal (New Canaan, CT: Keats, 1979) pp. xxv-xxx.

[48]William Gladstone in Edgar Jackson, The Christian Funeral (New York: Channel Press, 1966) pp. 9-10.

ator. A Service of Death and Resurrection notes that the funeral is

an act of Christian worship. Committal reflects, sociologically, an

act of respect and homage to the deceased on behalf of the community of

faith; psychologically, committal presents the stark reality of death

and the need for the living to "let go"; theologically, "it reflects

the Christian vision of things seen and unseen," providing the community

the opportunity to praise God and to pray for the dead and the living,

as the dead body is committed to God, and the living rededicate their

lives to God.[49]

The gospel message, the message of the promises in Jesus Christ's

life, death, and completed transformation by resurrection served as the

"crazy glue" for both the Early Church and the Church historically. The

proclamation visits and challenges persons wherever the gospel is preached

or lived-out through the quiet witness of Christians in the marketplace.

RUMORS OF IMMORTALITY AND RESURRECTION

All of Berger's transcendental signals point to this God of

transformation: God the creator, sustainer, judge, redeemer, the One who

can be trusted in life and death. Berger's "rumors" of the supernatural

especially point towards immortality, a trusting that there is more to

life than we can empirically know. God tries to make the presence of the

supranatural, the Immanuel, known through: our penchant for ordering;

our belief in future judgment (i.e., damnation); humor; play; and, hope.

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[49]A Service on Death and Resurrection (Nashville: Abingdon
Press, 1979) pp. 23, 68.

Schwarz notes:

> Besides the fact that man expresses the desire of immortality through cultural activities, through religious practices, and through simple assertion that death cannot be the end, there are three other phenomena that seem to substantiate the idea of immortality. Occultism seems to be a means of communicating with those who are beyond death, philosophy seems to give immortality to its logical reference system, and the biblical soul-body distinction seems to endow the idea of immortality with the theological sanctification.[50]

While the Bible condemns the occult, the occult still serves as a pointer, as that projected by humanity. Significant to this study and our contemporary situation is Schwarz's comment that during the era of the Enlightenment there was an increased importance in spiritualism, because Christian doctrine became blurred by the rationally-minded age.[51]

Another negative pointer to transcendental signals on immortality is conveyed by Thielicke. Thielicke notes that humans seek intoxication at the stations in life which most reflect the transitoriness of life, such as birthdays and New Year's Eve.[52] This is the subconscious knowledge of death, leading one to take flight. It is seen in the abhorrence by modern individuals of solitude, in the desire to be in a crowd and part of the crowd; in the need for "looking young," being healthy, being part of the active, empty noise of life. It is seen in the paradoxical "Sylvia Plaith cult" of punk rock and the "New Wave Movement" among today's youth, with their rejection of the future, embracing of the past, and obsession with death and death-defying feats. A current "in"

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[50]Hans Schwarz, On the Way to the Future (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1972) p. 169.

[51]Schwarz, p. 170.

[52]Thielicke, p. 73.

joke among senior high youth, a joke of anonymous origin, goes like this: "Do you know what Bing Crosby and John Wayne are getting for Christmas this year?" The answer is, "John Lennon." Even the "sick" humor points to the desire, the hope, that this life isn't all; a rumor validated in the gospel, and realized in a relationship with God through Christ.

Hans Küng notes that resurrection is a radical transformation which can't be objectified. It would not be a radical transformation from present life if resurrection could be illustrated with concepts, ideas, or ideals in present life.[53] It is difficult to identify transcendental signals of resurrection for that very reason, though the rumor of resurrection has existed in the lives of Jews and Christians for more than two thousand years. Perhaps the continued renewal of the Church, in spite of human blundering, is in itself a signal of transformation. There are three signals in our contemporary times that can be perceived symbolically as being rumors of resurrection: (1) the rebirth of the nation of Israel and its sustenance; (2) the Jewish Passover rite;[54] and, (3) the Christian Eucharist.[55] But, even the secular rite of marriage could be conceived as pointing to that transformation (ref. 2 Cor. 5:14-17).

To accept life in Christ is to live. To accept life in Christ, living each day in its fullness, in the acceptance of the inevitability

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[53]Küng, p. 350.

[54]Arthur Katz, "Passover" (Cassette Tape) (Phoenix: Jewish Voice Broadcasting Co., 1978).

[55]William F. Dunkel, et al., Companion to the Book of Worship (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970) p. 53.

of physical death, that is freedom. Our lives as saints, living in the freedom of God, are manifest daily in the actual conditions of our human relationships. We are free not to be martyrs in the masochistic sense. One day in the arena would be easier than confronting life daily and seeking to serve the Creator, rather than the created. We're free to live as truly human beings, witnessing faith through ethical actions, through an attitude of faith, grasping an alternate view of reality and being sustained by sharing fellowship with God through Christ and with other saints. The aim is to live the life hid in Christ in the midst of the human condition. It is Galations, chapter five, in the nitty-gritty of everyday life! It is a theology for dying; a theology for living. It is the unconscious or conscious recital each day: "Into Thy hands I commend my spirit. . ."

SUMMARY

Chapters two and three of this study comprised: a sociological analysis of the death phobia within American culture; discussed the dialectic faith process; provided a framework for developing a theology for dying, against the backdrop of scholastic reasoning and historical Church tradition; and, presented Berger's challenge to theologians to develop an anthropologically-significant theology. In this chapter a viable theology for living and dying, a Johannine model, has been established, relying on the scholarship of Helmut Thielicke and Jim A. Sanders. The model meets the United Methodist criterion for theologizing, is reflective of Wesleyan theological thought, neutralizes anthropodicy and theodicy, and is validated by transcendental signals. However,

transcendental signals for the resurrection are overshadowed by the uniqueness and eschatological dimension of the resurrection event. Signals of the resurrection are seen, experientially in the human domain, only in symbolic bas relief.

MOVING ON: A FOREWORD

A theology is as valid as it is practical. The remainder of this paper focuses on the implementation (i.e., the appropriation) of the theology for living and dying within the ongoing life of the parish and within the lives of those persons who are known as "Christians."

Chapter 5

PARISH POSSIBILITIES: INTEGRATING A THEOLOGY
FOR DYING WITHIN THE LOCAL CHURCH

Introduction

At the beginning of his address to the 1955 graduating class at

Union Theological Seminary in New York City, Paul Tillich asserted:

> The first difficulty you will experience when Jesus sends you
> ahead of him and gives you the power of healing is that many people
> will tell you that they do not need to be healed. And if you come
> to them with the claim that you will cast out the demons that rule
> their lives they will laugh at you and assure you that you are pos-
> sessed by a demon - just as they said to Jesus.
> Therefore, the first task of a minister is to make men aware
> of their predicament. Many of those who have gone out from our
> seminary to various congregations and communities have despaired
> over this task. . . either given up the ministry altogether, or
> they minister only to those who consider themselves healthy. They
> have forgotten their task to heal those who are sick. . . in-
> cludes those who are not aware that they are sick.[1]
> . . . . Evil in the divine order is not only mystery; it is also
> revelation. It reveals the greatness and danger of life. . . .[2]
> . . . . In many expressions of our secular culture especially in
> the present decades, the awareness of man's sickness is great. Is
> it only because of the prejudice that these people, who powerfully
> express the demonic bondage of man, do not look to the church or
> to you, the ministers, for healing and for casting out demons? Or
> is it because of the lack of healing power in the church, sick in
> its fear of sickness.[3]

The eminent theologian closed his address with the following

words of assurance: "There is no greater vocation on earth than to be

called to heal and to cast out demons. Be joyous in this vocation."[4]

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[1]Paul Tillich, <u>The Eternal Now</u> (New York: Charles Scribner's
Sons, 1963) p. 58

[2]Tillich, p. 61.

[3]Tillich, p. 62.

[4]Tillich, p. 64.

Reflections

In the preceding chapters I have suggested: a sociological analysis of secularized views and contemporary reactions to death and dying, which are reflective of secular civil-religious and religious values which are enmeshed and lack meaning in our generation; the sociolog-cial givens of religious reality, which the historical Church, espec-ially from the sociological perspective, has moralized; a historical overview of funereal expressions of faith (or lack thereof); and, the model of God as the transformer, the God of transformation, and Jesus Christ as the promise of our own transformation.

In recent years, the emphasis within the Church on death and dying has been reparative work - e.g., grief and bereavement counseling and workshops "post-facto." What I want to assert is: There is a place for bereavement counseling and workshops; there is also a place for the nurturing of persons prior to life crisis, for providing gospel truths and dialoguing about the meanings of life, dying and death. This type of "pre-crisis" nurture can make a crisis a Christian crisis - i.e., a crisis in which God conveys meaning and comfort to persons involved, rather than leaving those persons to their own, raw resources. Any preparation for coping with death is transferable to other crises in-volving loss - e.g., divorce, loss of a job, mature children leaving home, financial ruin, to name a few. Clergy are called to be enablers, "to cast out demons."

Purpose and Methodology

This chapter is reflective of that which precedes it. I want

to highlight possibilities for providing insights, programs, or pre-
sentations within the local parish, which will nurture persons, enabling
them to formulate and grasp a theology for dying and living. With the
exception of the workshop, the theology can be integrated into the regular,
ongoing program of the church. The focal point is experiential. At the
core of the word "experiential" is a list gleaned through repetitive ex-
periences in relationships within the parish or through workshops. The
list is entitled, "Oh, God, that smarts!"

The genesis of the list occurred about six years ago, while I was
attending a Sunday morning worship service. In the pew ahead of me was
a couple with their children. As the minister began the rite of baptism,
the mother very thoughtfully explained to her children that if that baby
wasn't baptized, then it wouldn't have a legal name; the water made the
name legal. The father nodded his head in agreement. I gritted my teeth,
thinking, "It tears me up when I see people in Church who don't know
about those things. Oh, God, that smarts!" That list greatly influenced
the format of this paper. I want to spell-out a few of the relevant
"Oh, God, that smarts" and suggest some possible counterpoints which I
have found helpful in the parish life before discussing the format and
procedure for a thantological workshop. The word "thantological" reflects
the sensitivity within the parish to the words "dying" and "death." A
Greek word like thanatology, or thanatological, is a gloss, but an
important gloss.

Context within the local parish is paramount. I'm not suggesting
pastors practice, as Paul Tillich put it, the fatal pedagogical error:
"To throw answers like stones at the heads of those who have not yet asked

the questions."[5] Rather, I'm suggesting a keen ear (and lots of prayer), to enable the pastor to compile his or her own lists of "Oh, God, that smarts" in the area of living and dying issues. And, I'm suggesting possible ways of working through these issues via my own list, with a "parish possibility" following an explication of each of the "that smarts." Each of the "that smarts" provides an opportunity to desensitize the words "death" and dying," as well as presenting a parish possibility for providing a means for enabling persons to theologize.

PARISH POSSIBILITIES

"That Smarts" Number One

At one end of the spectrum of responses to death of a "significant other," there is a pathological fixation of not "letting go." This entails enshrining both the memories and the belongings of the deceased person. But, at the other end of the spectrum is another type of cognitive dissonance, which reflects either medieval monasticism, sixteenth century Calvinistic practices, or plain secular views. This is hallmarked by the rejection of the physical body, and I've experienced this response to dying in three primary perspectives.

The first, very sincere, perspective I've heard about from parishioners is that heaven is a grand potluck dinner, enjoyed by the souls of Grandma, Uncle Fred, little Sally, and someday by the rest of us. Of course the angels provide the set-up, and God furnishes the fare for

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[5]Paul Tillich, in George Isaac Brown, <u>Human Teaching for Human Learning</u> (New York: Viking Press, 1971) pp. 14-15.

this perpetual and social messianic banquet. Persons who have related this perspective to me were over fifty years of age and long-standing church members. Death is viewed as a pleasant extension of the present.

The second perspective, a seemingly spiritual one, is the denigration of the physical body. Because this experience occurred again just last week, it is at the top of my painful response to the misinterpretations of the evangel. Over a year ago I served as a guest preacher at a United Methodist Church. The sermon concerned the twenty-third psalm as being a pattern for living, noting that God is with us on the mountaintops and in the valleys. After the service, a healthy-looking gent asked for a copy of the sermon. Unknown to me at the time, he was stricken with kidney disease.

Recently, I received a phone message, advising the man had died and his widow had asked for me. I went to the funeral home. There on the table in the viewing room was a bible with a sign: "Friends, Please Read This." The marked verse was Philippians, chapter three, verse twenty-one. The very cheery widow and her family initiated discussion with me, and the discussion centered on the husband's vile, diseased body. Drawing on hidden wells of composure, I pointed out that one of my favorite verses is the baptismal formula in Philippians (Phil. 2:5-11), and I recited that scripture to an unimpressed family. The funeral sermon, the next day, reflected on the "vile body." It was that which gave the family its greatest source of comfort. The body had been separated from the person.

The third perspective often involves persons who are well-educated and have read Jessica Mitford, but can't talk to dying relatives

about funeral arrangements. These persons have seen the Neptune Society ads in the Los Angeles Times, so as a relative approaches death or immediately following death, the ad is impulsively responded to, and the corpse is quickly dispatched via cremation and the scattering of ashes. Then, the hasty action begins to prey on the mind of the bereaved person. Within a few days, a pastor is called and requested to conduct a memorial service. This response and action is more common among "fringe members" of the church or non-church members who need some affirmation of their action and a sense of supportive community.

Each of the three examples appears to deny the importance of the physical body as part of God's creation. I am reminded of a story told by Tony Bell who heads the sociology department at Cal State, Fullerton. His young son had a frog which died, and the critter was hurriedly transported to the garbage can. A short time later the boy's grandmother died. Overhearing the conversation about her demise, he asked, "Are you putting Grandma in the garbage can?"

Parish Possibility Number One. First, there is the obvious, the move afoot to return funeral services to the Church. Presently, considerable efforts are being put forth in experimental liturgy and supplemental worship resources. The resources represent a theological searching and a desire for balanced doctrinal statements within relevant liturgy. This is especially true of the Service of Death and Resurrection. The guide to the service notes:

> Here, as elsewhere in Christian worship, Christ holds the service. He is host; the worshippers are guests. The words and the actions of the pastor and people are human means through which Christ can

save, heal, raise the newness of life; to this healing and salvation, the people respond in offering themselves.[6]

There is one small nuance that should be mentioned. If the funeral at the church is indeed a worship service, then it is appropriate to have the service printed as a worship bulletin, rather than relying on mimeographed memorial flyers provided by the funeral home.

The real parish possibility centers on working with the Worship Commission to develop, or to update, a funeral manual, a guide for the local church, delineating the church's policy on funerals for both members and non-members. In developing or updating a funeral manual, the pastor has the opportunity to share with Worship Commission members the theological underpinings in the funeral service and to elicit the concerns of the Commission members in regard to death. Both the guide to A Service of Death and Resurrection and the Companion to the Book of Worship are valuable resources. The Commission may want to discern if serving the Eucharist during a funeral service would be meaningful to the congregation. Appropriate music should also be a consideration. The manual can delineate the responsibility of the head usher, liaison with the funeral home staff, and physical considerations - such as where the coffin should be placed during the funeral service.

The guide to A Service of Death and Resurrection states that, in general, it is desirable to cover the coffin during the funeral service in the church with a pall.[7] The pall signifies the caring

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[6]A Service of Death and Resurrection (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979) p. 24.

[7]A Service of Death and Resurrection, p. 45.

community, covering the deceased member with prayers and thanksgiving even in death. It's a common denominator - i.e., the coffin underneath may be extravagant or a plain pine box. The pall can be ordered through Cokesbury, or church members can design palls which convey rich Christian symbols, which signify the gospel message of death and resurrection, allowing the coffin to be a part of the worship service, rather than a distraction in it. A special Easter candle, used on the altar at Easter time and for funeral services, is also meaningful. (It would be consistent with Judeo-Christian tradition to have a lighted votive candle on the altar on the anniversaries of the deaths of deceased parish members to recall with thanksgiving the life of the deceased and the ensurance of the continued relationship with God which is enjoyed by all the saints - both living and dead. Or, a special Sunday such as Memorial Day weekend could be designated for dedicating memorial gifts and remembering deceased parish members.)

A funeral manual would especially serve the pastor in planning and conducting services for non-members. The pastor may receive "unique" requests. I was once asked to read the poem "Face on the Bar Room Floor." If non-members request the resources of a local parish, then the guide can gently function as a reminder that the Church represents the gospel message, even as it serves in the world.

Paul E. Irion's book The Funeral: Vestige or Value? is a strong resource for assisting a Worship Commission in discerning the responsibility of the parish in providing facilities and the time of the pastor, organist, and other personnel for conducting funeral services for the non-churched. Irion also has a section in his book entitled "Guide for

Group Discussion of the Funeral."[8] Irion notes that there are three

types of funerals within contemporary society: (1) the religious funeral;

(2) the conventional funeral; and, (3) the humanistic funeral. The re-

ligious funeral conveys the desire to mark the passage of the person

within the Christian community in the context of the faith and hope em-

braced by that community. The conventional funeral represents the need

and desire of non-members to mark the passage of a person with a relig-

ious service. The humanistic funeral represents unitarian views, and

it's unlikely that the local parish would be asked to participate. How-

ever, Irion notes that the conventional funeral can be very humanistic,

if there is no understanding of Christian beliefs and symbols, if a

tension exists between the sacred and the secular to the point where

a church conducted service is irrelevant to participants.[9]

The relevance or irrelevance of the church conducted service can

hinge on the pastor's opportunities for dialogue with non-members. If,

in agreement with the Worship Commission and the Pastor-Parish Relations

Committee, it is decided that the pastor and the parish should be openly

available for conducting funerals for non-members, then time must be

allowed for the pastor to conduct appropriate follow-up visits. If con-

ducting funerals for non-members is viewed as a part of the parish's evang-

elistic outreach within the community, then no fee should be charged

by the funeral home, or accepted by the pastor, for conducting the service.

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[8]Paul E. Irion, The Funeral (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966)
pp. 225-230.

[9]Irion, pp. 127-136.

I have been met with curiosity and surprise when I have refused

a fee (or contribution) from non-members. Often I've heard comments

in regard to the assumption that the Church always charges for every-

thing, doesn't it? If a fee, contribution, or gift is received for con-

ducting a funeral for non-members in a conventional mode, then the "gift"

becomes a secular form of "indulgence." If the service is considered

a worship service, even for non-members, then, if possible, it should be

conducted in the sanctuary, with worship bulletins, hymnals, and some

visible support of the parish community, and not in a secularized funeral

home chapel which is void of Christian worship symbols.

"That Smarts" Number Two

The Eucharist is a strong symbol of, as well as an acting-out

and participating-in, the resurrection. Yet, I have encountered a lack

of understanding in regard to the sacrament and restraint among persons

of different ages, but especially teenagers, in participation and cele-

bration of the sacrament.

Parish Possibility Number Two. In dialoguing with persons hes-

itant to participate in the Eucharist, I learned that these persons, espec-

ially teenagers, had a deep sense of unworthiness. Older persons assoc-

iated the sacrament to a mysterium involving God's wrath (1 Cor. 11:27),

which had been applied to a thick layer of unworthiness and guilt. None

of the persons I dialogued with had considered the Eucharist to be God's

vouchsafe of mercy, forgiveness and eternal life. None had heard that

pastors in the United Methodist Church take Communion first (prior to

serving the elements to others) to signify the pastor's acknowledgement of himself/herself as "chief of sinners" in need of God's grace, forgiveness, reconciling, and strengthening love, which is appropriated in the sacrament.[10]

Wesley viewed the Eucharist as a means for conversion, as being capable of awakening within persons the resolve to belong wholly to God.[11] The Eucharist has been termed "the proclamation of the gospel message of death and resurrection 'par excellence'"[12] The sacrament can be conveyed (via the pastoral message) as a vehicle for receiving grace, forgiveness, and the vouchsafe of "zoe," eternal life.

"The Smarts" Number Three

This "smarts" is connected with the foregoing discussion in regard to teenagers and their sense of "unworthiness," but acutally centers on a generalized confusion concerning confirmation, what confirmation means, and what it is supposed to accomplish. Confirmation Resources for United Methodist Ministers adequately conveys the theological undergirdings for the rite of confirmation.[13] I want to suggest a needed supplement for the confirmation resources utilized in preparing youth, teens

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[10]William F. Dunkle, et al., Companion to the Book of Worship (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970) p. 68.

[11]Martin Schmidt, John Wesley (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973) II, 79-80.

[12]Dunkle, p. 66.

[13]Confirmation Resources for United Methodist Ministers (Nashville: Graded Press, 1977) Part I.

and adults for Church membership.

Parish Possibility Number Three. Younger youth are considered to be those who are completing, or who have completed, the sixth grade (eleven and twelve years of age). In her studies of children's perceptions of death, Marie Nagy observed that by age ten, children understand that death is a finality and universal. Nagy notes that: "the child's conception of death reflects in a large measure his general picture of the world."[14] Elizabeth Reed adds that parents (and other significant persons) interpret death for children as they convey personal thoughts on the meanings of death. Common misinterpretations given to the child center on God having taken the person who died.[15] Often, children at this age exhibit anger towards the person who died, the doctor, or God.[16]

In children, according to Marjorie Mitchell, the fear of dying is dread of separation from parents and friends.[17] Research completed by Sylvia Anthony concluded that the separation anxiety aroused in children in regard to dying can be assuaged in children, if there is implanted in the child's mind the notion of a reunion with loved ones in death, a

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[14]Marie Nagy, "The Child's View of Death," in Herman Feifel (Ed.) The Meaning of Death (New York: McGraw-Hill 1959) p. 98.

[15]Elizabeth Liggett Reed, Helping Children With the Mystery of Death (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1970) pp. 22-29.

[16]Marjorie Editha Mitchell, The Child's Attitude Towards Death (London: Barrie and Rockcliffe, 1966) p. 100.

[17]Mitchell, pp. 43-44.

reunion which makes any separation very temporary.[18] Basic aspects of a theology for dying and living are especially relevant for children.

Part ten of the <u>Confirmation Resources for United Methodist Ministers</u> is entitled "Joy of Salvation," and it includes a review of John Wesley's life.[19] Parts six and seven provide opportunities for highlighting Yahweh, the Transforming God, and this can be integrated with Wesley's life and his thoughts on eternal life and the communion of saints. Wesley noted: "Eternal life begins when we first know Christ. . . . Then it is that happiness begins; happiness that is real, solid, substantial."[20]

Intrinsic in Wesleyan theology is the profound sense of continuity and communion which, according to Anthony, can assuage a child's fear of death. Reed notes that death fears appear to recede at age ten or eleven, but re-emerge with force at adolescence.[21] By initiating dialogue on death with children, asking how they feel about the death of a grandparent or pet, the pastor opens the door for possible future dialogues.

Whereas younger youth need a reassuring gloss, teens and adults require a more concentrated opportunity to theologize about dying and death. This opportunity could conveniently be interjected in between part five, "Vital Words for a Meaningful Faith," and part six, "Creative

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[18]Sylvia Anthony, <u>Discovering of Death in Childhood and After</u> (London: Allen Lane, 1971).

[19]<u>Confirmation Resources</u>, p. 11.

[20]John Wesley, <u>Devotions and Prayers of John Wesley</u> (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1967) p. 60

[21]Reed, p. 23.

Living Through the Mysterious Presence" in both the senior high con-
firmation program[22] and in the adult preparation plan.[23]

Paul Irwin lists four crucial needs for youth. At least three
of these needs are crucial for adults: (1) finding personal acceptance
within the community of faith; (2) deepening interpersonal communications;
and, (3) shaping an ideology or vision of life.[24] It is among teenagers
and young adults that death appears to be ignored, glorified, or held in
contempt. Each of these reactions is an attempt to negate death. Suicide
is a special problem that needs to be addressed in gentle dialogue with
teenagers and adults. A goal for dialoguing about death among teens and
young adults is that the confirmees might come to accept death while em-
bracing life and the values of life in the Christian community, that the
confirmees might understand Thielicke's assertion:

> actual death has less importance than the fear and trembling
> with which I relate death to my current life. It is this anx-
> iety-ridden relating of my life to death, rather than physical
> departure, which is my death.[25]

Death makes sense only in relationship to the transforming God, through
Jesus Christ; the transforming God qualifies our living and dying.

The Methodist Audio-Visual Catalog, issued by Conference offices,
has a rich listing of films on death and dying. I have also used the

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[22]Confirmation Resources, pp. 55-62

[23]Confirmation Resources, pp. 71-78.

[24]Paul B. Irwin, The Care and Counseling of Youth in the Church
(Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) p. 17.

[25]Helmut Thielicke, Life and Death (Philadelphia: Fortress
Press, 1970) p. 157.

resourceful public library film system in several locations across the country. (For additional information, see APPENDIX, "Response to a Youth Crisis.") Whenever the meanings of dying and death are openly dialogued within small groups, there is the potential for finding un-healed grief wounds. Included in the Appendix is a guide by Howard J. Clinebell, Jr. on how to set up and lead a grief recovery group.

"That Smarts" Number Four

This "smarts" is a broad-spectrum response to parishioner-con-veyed feelings of meaninglessness in working, inflation, rearing child-ren - a sense of soul loneliness. Thielicke notes that preaching about death must center on teaching the gospel message. Proper teaching about death comes as a by-product, an emanation from the gospel message about God, the God: "who judges us and raises us up, who sets limits to our existence and yet in Christ brings us home again."[26]

Parish Possibility Number Four. Within recent years, two studies, one for adults and one for senior high youth, on the topic of death and dying have been available in the United Methodist curriculum materials. I haven't encountered anyone who has successfully utilized these mater-ials - perhaps because of a lack of preparatory possibilities or an un-awareness of the sensitivity to "dying" and "death" within the local con-gregations. There is one possibility which I have utilized successfully and know to have been successful for other pastors who have tried my experiment.

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[26]Thielicke, p. 164.

I was basically unsure of the theological views within a particular congregation in which I served. So, for four consecutive weeks I experimented with adding the following sentence in different parts of the liturgy: "Praise be to God. Through Jesus Christ, eternity begins now." For three weeks I received no response, and almost dropped the sentence the fourth week. Following the service on the fourth Sunday, two church officers, with "Aha" gleaming in their eyes, joyously acknowledged that they finally got the message. Almost two years after that "Aha," I met one of the officers at a church dinner in the district. She told me that when her teenage son or other problemmatic situations arise, she mentally hears me saying that in Christ we are in eternity, and she knows that God cares about the problem, and she can pray. (I'm not sure of the connection there, but eternity now is obviously some source of reassurance which has enhanced this woman's prayer life.) Materials within chapter two, three, and four of this study provide resources for this possibility within the context of liturgy, preaching and dialoguing. Often, it is not the grandiose programs or workshops, but simple, taken-for-granted thological statements that have the most impact on persons in sermons or liturgy, meeting the everyday needs of persons.

SUMMARY

Integrating a theology for living and dying into the ongoing program of the local parish entails witnessing to the gospel message, making known its relevance for living and dying. It requires a keen ear, an awareness of the theological thoughts within the faith community

concerning what life and death means within the context of Christ-
ianity and everyday living in the world. Often pastors assume that
parishioners who have attended Sunday School as children, have been con-
firmed, and have attended church for many years have an understanding
of the basics within the evangel. It appears that even if the basics
were conveyed within Sunday School or other programs, those basics were
unheard or not relevant to persons at that time. A recent article in
The United Methodist Reporter focuses on the lack of basic understanding
of the evangel within the parishes. The author bemoans the fact that very
little is offered to congregations in the way of spiritual nurture. He
poses the challenging, grating question of: "How long will the churches -
our own beloved United Methodist Church included - play games with
Christianity, with our Lord, and with the . . . souls of our people?"[27]

This chapter has focused on possibilities for introducing into
the local parish an alternate understanding of the meanings of life and
death - alternate from the secular understandings which exist within
our contemporary society. This alternate meaning system can be conveyed
in worship, liturgy, and programming within the Church. It is a
starting point which invites pastors to consider other possibilities,
to jot-down the "that smarts" they hear from parishioners in order to
gain an understanding of the theological needs within the parish.

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[27]William D. Haake, "Leaders Must Respond to Spiritual Growth
Needs," United Methodist Reporter (Dallas, TX), (November 21, 1980)
p. 2, cols. 4-6.

MOVING ON: A FOREWORD

In the next chapter discussion centers on the "how-to's" of presenting a death and dying workshop within the local parish. This chapter has been suggestive of preparatory work which will facilitate the success of a death and dying workshop. But, it is realized that some parishes may not need preparatory work, or the theological under-girding, because the preparation has already taken place. Or, some-times, situations require a moving-ahead, with the workshop presented in response to immediate needs within a congregation.

Chapter 6

THE DEATH AND DYING WORKSHOP

The most intensive approach for integrating a theology for dying within the local parish (and community) is the workshop model. The purpose of this chapter is to delineate the nuances and elements involved in presenting a death and dying workshop. Discussions in previous chapters provide retrievable materials which can be utilized for background information and actual workshop presentations. Three workshop models are illustrated. The appropriateness of each model is noted, and sample workshop schedules are listed, along with emphases, or major themes, and possible "snafus."

PLANNING A WORKSHOP

It seems superfluous to state that death and dying workshops require preliminary planning and effort within the parish and community to ensure participation and the possibilities for emotional and spiritual growth. But, the actual planning is contingent upon several factors, such as context, the pastoral and community resources which are available, and the church facilities. These factors can effect which model of workshop is most appropriate, so the factors will be addressed, then the workshop models will be outlined.

Context

Whenever I'm requested to give a workshop, I like to attend both a worship service and coffee hour at the church, as well as to talk to

the pastor to determine: (1) the ages of persons in the congregation; (2) the theological or doctrinal leanings within the parish - e.g., neo-pentecostal, traditional, liberal; (3) the recent happenings within the community and the concerns of the parish - e.g., the recent death of a youth can greatly effect the "soul" of the parish; and, (4) the pastor's perceptions of congregational needs and hopes. If attending a service and coffee hour is impractical, then I rely on the pastor's discernment. It has been reported to me that this pastoral exercise of considering the context is, in itself, a challenging and growth inciting experience for the pastor.

Leadership Requirements

The primary requisite for anyone leading a death and dying workshop is that the leader has completed, or is well on the way, in working through his/her own theology on dying. Team leadership is decidedly preferable. Leading a workshop is emotionally enervating, and often involves considerable follow-up counseling. Team leadership allows for the possibility of two or more role models and a comfortable division of tasks. It also facilitates possible role-playing, and allows for the dummy (in bridge game terminology ONLY) to pick-up on participant sentiments that might pass by the active team leader. If team leadership is possible, then segments of the workshop planning and activities can be assigned by expertise and interests. It's possible and desirable for the lay leader or another active layperson to be considered or primed for a co-leadership position, for the obvious reason that laity tend to identify with laity and draw strength from laity role models.

When I have served in a solo leadership position, I haven't hesitated to enlist capable assistance to allow me a breather. The Reverend Bob Huston, Director of Clergy Relations at Forest Lawn, was a welcomed and well-received speaker during the final segment of a multi-session workshop where he delineated: (1) what funeral prices include; (2) what state laws require; (3) common sense in planning a funeral service; and, (4) his own funeral planning, which was low-cost, no-fuss, Christian worship service. Other capable assistants who I have found to be most resourceful include: a lawyer from within the local congregation who provided guidance and resources for do-it-yourself will-writing; a medical doctor who shared his fears of death, concerns over prolongation of life in terminally ill patients and the concept of the "living will;" and, a social sciences professor from a local college who shared the family systems approach to death, noting how death may trigger varying reactions among different members of a family.

Local funeral homes often have an extensive library of death and bereavement books. They are usually very willing to provide bibliographies for workshop participants, noting which books are available for loan within the community. Also, I have acquired from funeral home directors in different locations printed funeral planning guides. These guides serve to assist persons in listing their personal funeral requests, and can be kept on file in the church office.

Church Facilities

Atmosphere is important. A church parlor or fellowship hall where chairs can be set in a large circle is the optimal setting for

forty or less workshop attendees. If a church doesn't have a parlor or fellowship hall, or if more than forty participants are anticipated, then the sanctuary is fine, provided the leaders sit on chairs beneath the chancel area to close distance between themselves and attendees and to reinforce the notion that the workshop is a sharing experience and not a worship service. Reservations are a neat idea to gauge attendance and to assist in deciding where a workshop should be held. But, in my experience, it can be a block for persons within the community who don't want to "commit" themselves, or who are afraid that their name may be placed on the church mailing list.

To help reinforce a warm atmosphere, several helpers are needed to prepare and take care of the serving of coffee or tea, or to serve as greeters at the door. These greeters can also be asked to join sharing groups to elicit sharing in group experiences; to have available paper and pencils; and, to visit with persons from the community during coffee-breaks.

Atmosphere is also provided by the pastor in advance of the workshop. It is desirable to have death (and theological reassurance) addressed in the liturgy or pastoral prayer for several weeks prior to the workshop. The words "death" and "dying" carry heavy baggage. It is usually preferable to bill the workshop as a "thanatological" workshop, with the pastor explaining the meaning of the word "thantology" and noting the purpose(s) of the workshop in the announcement portion of the service for a few weeks prior to the workshop date. Often, if the workshop is opened to the community, it is less threatening to parishioners! Publicity committees within the local church can

solicit community participation via news releases sent to local newspapers, Parent-Teacher Associations within local schools, and through the local ministerial association.

WORKSHOP MODELS

There are three basic workshop models: (1) the mini-workshop; (2) the lengthened workshop; and, (3) the multi-session workshop.

The Mini-Workshop

The mini-workshop usually runs three hours with one break for lunch or coffee. It is especially appropriate for small groups, senior citizens, or a workshop offered for only parish members. It can conveniently be scheduled as part of a United Methodist Women's program, in conjunction with a potluck dinner or lunch after church, or in lieu of a scheduled commission meeting. It is very appropriate for a congregation comprised of primarily senior citizens who do not want a longer workshop, because it is uncomfortable for them to sit for long periods.

Very often senior citizens have a pre-tailored agenda they want to discuss. Consequently, less time is required. Or, on the basis of discovered concerns in a mini-workshop, they may request a second workshop at a later date. It has been my experience that elderly persons are concerned about how to convey to their families the personal wishes they have in regard to dying if they are stricken with a terminal illness. They also usually have some specific ideas about how they want their funerals and burials conducted, and want to make those preferences known. (The funeral planning guide is a good way for the

elderly to share their ideas with their family.) A third need stressed
by the elderly is guidance in knowing how to talk with their friends
who are dying or who have recently lost a spouse.

The elderly are savvy people, and they usually know about wills,
and have, generally, formulated their theology of dying. They want
theological reassurance and concrete suggestions concerning their
interests. (Elderly persons who have shared their theology of dying
with me have edified me, serving as spiritual cheerleaders for me and
other workshop leaders.) One final item needs to be addressed in regard
to the elderly. If an elderly person has already experienced the death
of children, or if there has been a long-standing rift within the family,
there may be a need for follow-up counseling.

The Lengthened Workshop

This lengthened model of the mini-workshop runs typically from
9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. with a forty-five minute break for lunch.
It is probably the most convenient workshop if community resource
leaders are available on Saturdays, and if persons from outside the
church serve as team leaders (so the pastor isn't processing the sermon
for the next day while trying to lead an emotionally-enervating workshop).
However, it is my least favorite type of workshop, and I would discourage
its use for two main reasons: (1) the logistics of trying to determine
attendance, cost of the lunch, preparation and serving, or, people forget-
ting brown bags; and, (2) it is like a marathon run, with more material
presented than during a mini-workshop, but with less time to process it.
Unless there is some type of follow-up, there is no sense of fellowship

or community extended to non-members attending the workshop, and there is little opportunity for debrief and feedback. If this model workshop could be held on the Saturday prior to Lent, then appropriate Lenten materials might facilitate a type of follow-up for church attenders. And, the timing allows for the emphasis on the evangel of resurrection in the Easter story.

The Multi-Session Workshop

The multi-session workshop is the most strenuous. But, it is also ideal in that it: (1) facilitates a sense of community and continuity; (2) allows persons to work-through problems they may have; (3) provides for feedback; and, (4) allows time for utilization of resource persons from within the congregation or community. Its draw-back is that often persons don't want to commit to three evenings. Persons can be encouraged to attend only one session, if they can't attend three. It has been my experience that persons attending the first or second sessions, with the intention of being present for only one session, return for the following sessions(s). This requires planning, though, for three independent segments, with the review of materials discussed at previous sessions.

This model is usually scheduled from 7 p.m. to 9:30 p.m. on three consecutive evenings with one brief coffee or tea break at about 8 p.m., and then an open, "help yourself coffee bar" thereafter. (If persons feel challenged or threatened, holding a cup or sipping gives some satisfaction.) The workshop "officially" ends with the debrief just before 9:30 p.m., then persons usually remain, nursing the coffee pot, comparing experiences, asking questions, or giving feedback until

about 10:30 p.m. This, in itself, is a part of the closure following the initial debrief. When assigned volunteers begin clearing the coffee, this is usually taken as a signal that it's time to move on.

BASIC CONTENTS IN THE AGENDA

As previously emphasized, the contents and process of a workshop are determined by the needs and interests of the workshop participants. However there are several basic concepts which I try to include in each workshop model. In general, I progress from the least threatening to the most threatening. I consider the following, in order, to be of the greatest significance: (1) theological affirmations about dying and eternal life; (2) the death of the individual; and, (3) how to communicate with the terminally ill. The format, or agenda items, which I consider basic are as follows, and I've listed them sequentially.

Goals or Possibilities

Even though the pastor or the publicity committee have made known the generalized goals, I reiterate and expand on those goals and possibilities. The goals are basically: (1) assisting persons in recognizing the meanings about life and dying conveyed culturally; (2) to enable persons to theologize about their own death; (3) to facilitate coping with crises and losses in life; and, (4) to provide growth and nurture which will facilitate workshop participants in being sensitive to the needs and concerns of the terminally ill. I try to emphasize how learning about death gives us freedom and assists in coping with life's losses, enabling us to help others.

Leadership Style

The leadership model or style which seems most appropriate for the workshop is that of a facilitative, wise companion, one who is on pilgrimage with the workshop participants, one who shares in order to convey pertinent information and to elicit group wisdom. I usually advise participants that: the setting is casual; that participants will be challenged, in order to stimulate working through personal thoughts on death; and, that counseling or dialogue is available upon request. Participants are encouraged to interrupt to ask questions, or to share their thoughts or experience. I also advise the participants that if they have difficulty in talking about death, then they are among a great American majority.

Format

I spell out the structure of the workshops - i.e., topics to be discussed, group experiences, coffee-breaks, and dismissal time. I then ask if there are any special needs or additional topics which the participants would like to have included in the agenda. Bibliographies are distributed at this time.

Disclosure

This is the sharing of leadership backgrounds and particular interests in dying and death issues. I then ask if the participants would like to share their particular interests or reasons for attending the workshop. If there are terminally-ill persons among the participants, they will often respond during this time.

Cultural Responses to Death

This includes highlighting: that our response(s) to death are determined by enculturalization; factors that make dying more difficult to cope with - i.e., medico-technological influences, materialistic orientation within society, mobility, and lack of extended family; the lack of a dying role within society; and, weakening of the Church's role.

Theological Gleanings

In contrast to the cultural responses to death, the basic theological underpinings in Christianity concerning living and dying are discussed, along with Wesleyan thoughts on the communion of saints, dying and eternal life through Jesus Christ. I highlight that each person is a unique gift on loan from God to loved ones and the community, and that death can be grievious in spite of faith, because the gift is sorely missed. This leads into the next topic on the general agenda.

Types of Death and Grief Variables

By that I mean lingering illness culminating in death, sudden death, death by mutilation, death of the young person, the elderly, or suicide. Each type of death triggers a different grief response, which is determined, in part, by the quality and length of relationship with the dead person; timeliness or untimeliness of death; and, the nature of the death. I delineate between be-reavement, grief and mourning, as well as indicating what comprises normal, chronic, delayed, and pathological grief.

The Dying Person

Weisman's listing of the six things every dying person is entitled to have is delineated: (1) informed consent - i.e., the right to choose control over one's life; (2) safe conduct - i.e., not to be dehumanized by medical treatment; (3) something or someone to die for to make death significant; (4) death rehearsal - i.e., time for anticipating grief and for planning; (5) timeliness - i.e., being prepared to die; and, (6) appropriate death - i.e., dying with dignity.[1]

I then discuss Kübler-Ross' five stages of awareness in dying,[2] as well as noting Goffman's five stages in the process of working through a "spoiled identity,"[3] and review the negative responses to persons as perceived by ill persons in Jane Brodie's You Can Fight Cancer and Win.[4] Particularly, I highlight the terminal person's need for acceptance, being touched and a craving for dialogue. A key frustration perceived by the dying is a lack of control over one's own life, often leading to a need to seek control in insignificant matters, such as how high the window shade must be raised. Negative and positive examples, conveyed through role-playing, are especially effective in conveying the needs of the dying. The pro's and con's of care in convalescent homes, the hospice, and the hospital are discussed.

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[1] Avery D. Weisman, "The Psychiatrist and the Inexorable," in Herman Feifel (Ed.) New Meanings of Death (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1977) pp. 115-119.

[2] Kübler-Ross, pp. 38-112.

[3] Goffman, pp. 100-109.

[4] Brodie, pp. 196-223.

Death as a Personal Challenge

This component varies greatly in each workshop model. During a mini-workshop, I highlight what I term "dying's housekeeping chores," such as wills, legal matters, and the completion of a funeral planning guide to be kept on file in the church office. The benefits of the funeral planning guide are noted, and the theology which undergirds the United Methodist funeral rite is explained.

In a lengthened workshop, I begin asking persons to write down three things they would like to do if they were to learn they had only one month to live. I then request that we break up into groups of four to six persons to share the feelings and thoughts experienced in listing the three things. I ask co-leaders and greeters to join one of the groups to assist, if needed, in helping persons to share. We then come together to debrief, attend to the housekeeping chores, and have several brief presentations on wills and the costs and options in funeral services and burials. As a means of debriefing the discussion concerning funerals, the theological significance of the Christian burial rite is delineated for workshop participants.

The multiple session workshop offers the opportunity for group experience and guided imagery, because persons have the opportunity to work through their thoughts on death. The imagery utilized is a variation of Howard Clinebell's exercise in Growth Counseling for Marriage Enrichment.[5] Rather than using a box imagery, I ask partici-

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[5]Howard J. Clinebell, Jr., Growth Counseling for Marriage Enrichment (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975) pp. 29-30.

pants to visualize a cage or an open-barred prison, each with a possible escape. The box, which is used in imagery in other growth groups so successfully is too threatening in this type of situation, because it can be associated with a coffin.

Group exercises or experiences include writing one's own obituary, and sharing within a small group how one wants to die - i.e., suddenly, after a short illness, during sleep, or whatever. Another successful group experience is asking persons to write three adjectives on a piece of paper, adjectives which describe their feelings about death. I suggest adjectives such as "inevitable," "spooky," "accepting," or "coping." If there appears to be quite a bit of fear within the group, I ask persons to write on a piece of paper all of their fears concerning death. Then, I ask if they can turn over those fears to God, entrusting them to God. Next, I request the paper on which the lists are written be gathered in a waste paper basket, and the fears are consecrated to God.

Debriefing

At the close of any exercise and each session, ten or fifteen minutes is allowed for debriefing, the sharing of thoughts, feelings, or concerns. Participants are asked to give feedback regarding the exercises or any topic discussed. A serious critique is encouraged. In lengthier models, participants are asked to evaluate the workshop via a simple evaluation form. In the mini-workshop, these evaluation forms usually do not give much feedback. Persons usually give great accolades or comments like: "I don't know."

VARIATIONS IN BASICS

As previously noted, the agenda is altered for senior citizens in order to meet their needs and concerns. Among younger couples, I include the grief reactions to Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS). These reactions usually include guilt feelings, confusion and special support needs. If many of the participants are middle-aged couples, I emphasize elderly parents, nursing homes, and social death.

"SNAFUS"

Before giving sample agendas for the three workshop models, I want to note some "snafus" which I have encountered. Initially, workshop participants may be hesitant to respond during debriefing. If leaders are willing to vent their thoughts, or recall feelings concerning their first encounter with an exercise, this appears to elicit response. Among workshop attendees there may be special needs: persons with grief wounds; persons who are terminally ill; or, persons with an intense fear of the devil and hell, with a brimstone theological orientation.

It has been my experience that attendees who are terminally ill are usually so uncomfortable that they will share their special needs during the opening part of the workshop, but need much affirmation. I usually ask if I may talk with them following the workshop, so that they can share some of their thoughts with me. This serves to discern if special care or counseling is required, and it also serves to very gently "cut-off" these persons in case they traumatize other participants. Very often these persons are experiencing pain in the area of family

relations and a lack of control over their own lives. If so, then I eliminate imagery, which may backfire. Persons with grief wounds or a brimstone theological orientation need counseling outside of the session.

Sometimes persons will be sidetracked into issues such as euthanasia and Karen Quinlan, or the pro's and con's of conventional funeral preparations versus a speedy, Neptune Society dispatch. I've found the best way to deal with this, if it arises, is to break up into small groups to discuss the issues, asking each group to assign a secretary and group spokesperson. Then we regroup, and each group spokesperson is asked to share group thoughts.

If a group appears to be particularly rigid and uncomfortable looking at the onset of a workshop, it helps if leaders are willing to dialogue and disclose their thoughts and fears, or joys and faith, in regard to dying. Persons may ask questions which are beyond the resources of the leadership. Humility is usually the best course of action. There's something honorable about an honest "I don't know," or, "I wonder if that would be somewhere in the materials listed on the bibliographic sheet." Finally, it is not unusual for the final session in a multi-session workshop to run past dismissal time. This appears to be some type of hesitancy in going through closure. It's very helpful if persons can be ensured that the pastor will be available for dialogue, if in the next week or so following the workshop there is a need to further debrief, question, or share brainstorms.

SAMPLE AGENDAS

The Mini-Workshop

The mini-workshop can be scheduled in the evening, or in con-junction with a potluck lunch after church on Sunday. The following agenda is for a workshop after a potluck lunch on Sunday. It can be adapted for an evening function by adding a coffee-break. There is no coffee-break included in the post-lunch schedule, but persons are asked to help themselves to coffee, or to take restroom breaks as needed during the workshop.

12:30 p.m.	Goals, leadership style, and disclosures
12:50 p.m.	Format, responses to request for other discussion
1:00 p.m.	Cultural responses to death; death denial in culture
1:30 p.m.	Types of death and grief variables
2:00 p.m.	Needs of dying persons
2:30 p.m.	Hospitals, convalescent homes, and hospices
2:45 p.m.	Theological affirmations in living and dying
3:15 p.m.	Debrief and distribution of evaluation sheets
3:30 p.m.	Dismissal

The preceding schedule is meant to give a rough sketch of time allowed for topics. Of course, additional requests lead to rapid alter-ations in scheduling. If time can't be allocated within the workshop to discuss special interests, persons are usually quite willing to meet with someone on the leadership team following the workshop session.

The Lengthened Workshop

9:30 a.m.	Goals, leadership style and disclosures
10:00 a.m.	Format and responses
10:15 a.m.	Cultural responses to death
10:45 a.m.	Types of death and grief variables
11:15 a.m.	Needs of the dying person
11:50 a.m.	Lunch break
12:20 p.m.	Role-playing of leaders taking the parts of dying persons, family members, then friends·
12:40 p.m.	Debrief on role-playing, questions, responses
1:00 p.m.	Theological affirmations in living and dying
1:20 p.m.	Death as a personal challenge
1:35 p.m.	Debrief and responses
1:45 p.m.	Writing wills, the funeral or memorial, the funeral planning guide
2:05 p.m.	Debrief and distribution of evaluation sheets
2:30 p.m.	Dismissal

(Persons usually prefer to take home the funeral planning guide; the lengthy debrief at 2:05 p.m. allows for any questions that might be asked in regard to the funeral planning guide.)

The Multi-Session Workshop

The First Evening:

7:00 p.m.	Welcome, introduction of team leaders and resource personnel by pastor or lay leader
7:10 p.m.	Listing of goals and possibilities by one workshop leader
7:20 p.m.	Leadership styles dialogued. If group appears rigid, storytelling or disclosure

7:30 p.m.	Format and responses
7:45 p.m.	Disclosures by leadership
8:15 p.m.	Coffee-break
8:30 p.m.	Cultural responses to death
9:15 p.m.	Debrief
9:30 p.m.	Dismissal

Second Evening:

7:00 p.m.	Review and feedback
7:15 p.m.	Types of death and grief variables with dialoguing between leaders or leaders and a resource person
8:15 p.m.	Coffee-break
8:30 p.m.	Needs of the dying persons
9:00 p.m.	Role-playing regarding relating to a dying person
9:15 p.m.	Debrief
9:30 p.m.	Dismissal

Third Evening:

7:00 p.m.	Review and feedback
7:15 p.m.	Dying as a personal challenge; theological affirmations
7:35 p.m.	Group Exercises
8:05 p.m.	Debrief and coffee-break
8:20 p.m.	Discussion on Living Wills and drafting estate wills
8:45 p.m.	The funeral or memorial as a rite of passage; funeral home, burial and cremation information
9:05 p.m.	Writing own obituary and sharing within groups how persons would prefer to die
9:20 p.m.	Debrief, distribution of funeral planning guides and evaluation sheets
9:30 p.m.	(Usually later) Dismissal

SAMPLE EVALUATION SHEET

The evaluation sheets are usually filled out over a cup of coffee and left on a table in the narthex. The following questions are usually included on the evaluation sheet:

1. In general, was this workshop, in your perception:
   poor _____ fair _____ satisfactory _____ excellent _____

2. Which part of the workshop was most helpful to you?

3. Which part of the workshop was the least helpful to you?

4. What approach would have made this workshop more meaningful for you?

   _____ more role-playing _____ more group exercises _____ more debrief time

   _____ more dialoguing _____ Other: Please list _____

5. What recommendations do you have for future thanatological workshops?

6. Would you like a follow-up visit with the pastor to discuss any concerns emanating from this workshop?

   _____ Yes   _____ No

If yes, please list your name and phone number.

Sometimes evaluations and feedback are forthcoming months or years later when persons finally utilize the information they integrated during a workshop. The feedback usually is given after a funeral or a life crisis.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The general ministry - of which all clergy are a part - is called, in the spirit of Berger's dialectic, to objectivate, to seek and to carry the rumors of the supranatural; to tell the story; to embrace the story as our story; to be wise and facilitative companions with other

Christians on the journey of faith, the pilgrimage. God is the God of transformation, the One who can transform our pasts by forgiveness, who can transform our future in the present.

Pilgrims are those persons who dwell in the land, but who have an altered view of: (1) the sources of sustenance within life and its crises; (2) to Whom they are ultimately responsible; (3) why it is necessary to struggle for societal justice and freedom - i.e., images of God's transforming nature carried into society by Christians; (4) the meanings of life and dying; and, (5) ultimate reality. Being a pilgrim, a person with an altered view of reality, isn't a role for the weak, uninformed, superstitious, or totally self-reliant person. Pilgrims are called to wrestle with theological issues, with God if need be, to formulate a theology for dying and living; to be informed; to be sustained for actions in everyday life. Pilgrims are called to go forth, to broadcast that the God of the gospel is the God who believes in humanity. God is a transforming God, the God of the transformation.

Go forth. Cast out demons.

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APPENDIX

Appendix 1

CASE STUDY ONE: A PREPARATORY
WORKSHOP EXPERIENCE

(Names are changed in the case study and details omitted
to ensure anonymity.)

Alma, a pleasant-looking woman in her late 50's, arrived at the workshop with red eyes. She silently sobbed through most of the first session. While the other team leader was speaking, I went to her, and asked if I could help her. She shook her head "no." During the coffee break, others tried to console her. After dismissal, I asked if she would like to chat. She said she couldn't talk about it yet. Alma was unknown to the pastor and other church members.

The next evening Alma returned with her thirty-year-old daughter and, together, they quietly sobbed, unable to respond to persons wanting to assist. At the end of the session, Shirley, a fifty-year-old woman dying with an inoperable heart disease, threw her arms around Alma and hugged her. Alma's daughter Karen managed to introduce herself and her mother to Shirley and me. Karen arrived for the third session of the workshop without her mother. She cried less than she had the previous night, but sat apart from the group. After the dismissal, she apologized to me for crying, but said she'd heard every word. I told her that many of us have trouble in warm weather with sweaty eyes. She managed a chuckle, and asked if she could talk with me.

Karen and I had several talks, and, eventually, Alma and her husband Lloyd joined us. Alma's son, Karen's "baby brother" Al, who was thirty-years old, was afflicted with a malignant brain tumor. He was also an alcoholic, divorced, remarried, and the father of two children. He was, at that time, married to an alcoholic, an "out of grace" Roman Catholic divorcee with three children from previous marriages. Al and his wife were a source of shame and embarrassment to the family who wanted Al to join Alcoholics Anonymous so that he could at least die sober.

There were clearly two (or more) problems: Al's alcoholism and Al's terminal illness. With counseling and the assurance that Al's alcoholism would vanish with hospitalization and pain drugs, the family was able to accept and show love for Al the alcoholic. Eventually, they won his trust and confidence. Karen related one day that she'd gone to a bar, just to meet and talk with Al. She bought him a drink. Her voice carried the sense of freedom and achievement she felt in actually buying Al a drink in a bar in the middle of the day.

The family became responsible for Al's medical care, since his

wife was coping with his illness by going from one alcoholic blackout to the next. Alma and Lloyd began attending church, and Karen and her family began attending a church near their home. Our talks began to center on faith issues and practical aspects of Al's care. Al's trust and confidence in his family grew. Great conversations began between Al and his family, concerning his care, hospitalization, and imminent death. The "great conversations" climaxed in a death-bed conversion experience related by Al and experienced by his parents.

When Al was finally placed in a convalescent home during the final weeks of his life, the family asked me to visit with him. I visited him, but suggested to the family that they contact a male minister in the area who could visit Al, as well as work with Al's wife and family during the funeral and afterwards. Al's residence was a considerable distance from the church in which I was working. And, I perceived that a male pastor could serve as a role model for his childre, and be more acceptable to Al's macho friends, most of whom were alcoholics.

After Al's death, Karen phoned me to advise: Al had died; the minister they had lined up had bailed out; and Al's wife Kathleen was being impossible. Karen asked if I and another associate would conduct the funeral at a funeral home chapel, which Kathleen had selected. She advised that she was afraid that the funeral home might refuse to have a service in view of some of Kathleen's actions and verbalizations at the funeral home. I visited Kathleen, to see if I would be acceptable. She was drunk, but most accomodating. That mood lasted only until the funeral service commenced. The funeral sermon was an all-time challenge.

The associate and I arrived at the funeral home chapel forty-five minutes early. The parking lot was filled with motorcycles, vans, liquor bottles, and happy and crying drunks. Alma, Lloyd, Karen, and the children and step children of Al were despondent. After Kathleen disrupted the funeral for the third time, by cussing Al for dying, and starting arguments with others attending the funeral, I requested she be removed. Then, the funeral actually began.

Considerable follow-up and referral was required. When the family tried to give me a "gift," I advised them that my fee entailed two payments: (1) prayer for me; and, (2) for them to help someone else when they perceived themselves to be recovered and strengthened. Karen periodically sends me notes. She and her family have become actively involved in a local church and in the community. Alma and Lloyd joined a church. Recently, I received a note from Alma. She said that she had finished reading Granger Westberg's Good Grief, which I had recommended to her, but she wasn't ready to concede that any grief could be good. She immediately added that she could still gain comfort in knowing that Al was reconciled to his family and God before he died, and she noted that she and Lloyd had grown very close, appreciating each other and their time together. Alma closed her note by telling me that she is in a training program to become a Red Cross hospital volunteer, to help others.

Appendix 2

CASE STUDY TWO: AN EXTEMPORANEOUS
MINI-WORKSHOP FOR YOUTH

(Names are changed in the case study and details omitted
to ensure anonymity.)

Betty Kyle was the church organist. Her husband Tom had served in every key position within the parish. Tom, Jr. and Jean were the ideal teenagers, active in the church and honor students in college. Then, there was seventeen-year-old Steve Kyle. Steve didn't like school and shunned church, a real loner. He hoped to finish high school, if he could manage the grades, and go on to technical school to become a plumber. Steve never seemed to belong to a family with four other persons who were so intellectual, so polished, and so uniquely gifted in so many areas.

On a Friday afternoon while Betty, Tom, and other choir members were preparing to leave for the annual choir retreat, Steve was killed in a bizarre accident. An auto went out of control, jumped a sidewalk and shrubs, then hit Steve with an impact that caused sudden death. The family, the choir, Steve's girl friend and high school chums were numb.

On Saturday the youth minister began receiving calls from senior high youth in the church. The youth had never met Steve, yet they were deeply disturbed by his death. Amidst completing the overhaul of the worship service and sermon for the next day, and developing a special resurrection service (funeral service) to meet critical needs, it was discerned that the youth needed an opportunity to vent their feelings.

Two sets of parents were asked to assist with a mini-workshop, a rap session after lunch on Sunday. The group discussion was offered for senior high youth and young adults, and it was broadcast via telephone chains and an announcement during the Sunday worship service. Chairs were set up in a circle on the lawn, under the trees, to try to create a natural and pleasant setting. It was anticipated that a dozen youth would attend; twenty-eight youth and young adults and three sets of parents were present.

The group appeared to be very quiet - funereal, with heads downcast and no usual buzzing. The youth minister began by stating we were meeting to talk about Steve's death, to share our feelings. He asked if anyone would like to began by sharing their positive or negative feelings. The silence stretched each second into hours. Unable to tolerate the silence any longer, I said "When I learned that

my mother was dying, I hated it." I looked across at a college student, asking, "Kevin, what do you think about death?" He blurted out: "It's shitty."

After Kevin broke the group silence, everyone began to talk at once. We decided to go around the circle to give everyone an opportunity to share. A repeated theme was: we closed Steve out; we never knew him; we never invited him to join us, to be with us. The parents who were present shared their impulse to gather their kids, to know where their kids were at every moment. One father shared how he realized his son could be killed like Steve, and all of a sudden it didn't matter that his son had a filthy room, dirty hair, and the life ambition to be a tennis pro. Others shared grief concerning a dead or dying elderly relative. The youth minister and I shared the notion of each individual is a gift, on loan, from God.

At that point someone suggested the group go to the funeral home to view Steve's body. The response among the youth to the suggestion was unanimous. We piled into cars and carpooled to the funeral home, after agreeing that we would stay at the funeral home no longer than ten minutes.

The reactions at the funeral home ranged from stoical to sobbing. When we regrouped, there was a sense of moroseness hanging over the group. Again the notion of having closed out Steve took center-stage. The youth minister offered to role-play, being Steve, allowing persons to meet Steve, to apologize or say good-bye to him, or to say whatever they would like to have said to him when he was alive. We moved two chairs into the center of the circle. The youth minister sat in the one chair. I went first, and felt silly talking to Steve, or the pseudo-Steve in the chair across from me. However, one-by-one, each person sat in the spare chair and spoke to "Steve." As each sat down again within the circle, there was a sense of relief, which was verbalized.

Following the role-playing exercise, to abate any personal fears of dying, I noted Wesley's thoughts on realized eschatology. The youth minister and I alternated in reading biblical passages referring to death and resurrection. The youth minister reminded the youth that he was available for the usual midnight and early morning calls, if anybody wanted to chat later. Then, we closed by going around the circle in prayer, giving every person the opportunity to pray.

Almost a year has passed since I left the church, but I still feel a special bond with each of the kids who were in that group that afternoon. And, I know the feeling is mutual, because several of those kids have made toll calls to share very special news, like decisions on which college to attend, broken-up romances, new romantic ventures, and marriage and career plans. This bond and their zest for living is the best type of feedback.

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These consist of pages:

149-153

Edgar Jackson, Understanding Grief, Its Roots, Dynamics and Treatment. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1957. A comprehensive discussion of grief and the process of recovery from it.

Edgar Jackson, You and Your Grief. Manhasset, NY: Channel Press, 1961. A guide to the process of recovery from grief.

Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, On Death and Dying. New York: The Macmillan Company, 1969. A paperback book for use in growth groups on grief and dying.

C. S. Lewis, A Grief Observed. New York: Seabury Press, 1961. His moving account of Lewis' response to the death of his wife.

Granger Westberg, Good Grief. Rock 'sland, IL: Augustana, 1962. A paperback summarizing the insights about coping with the stages of grief; can be used as a resource in a grief group.

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